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NO LITTLE ENEMY

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FOR THE TWO CAPTAINS
HOWARD AND JOE

There is no little enemy.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

1

THE COLORED BARTENDER on the noon train from Washington to New York was used to the famous and the great, but no one did he serve more lovingly than the lone tired-looking man at the front end of the club car. This man looked neither like a congressman, a brain truster, nor a consultant on the value of square dancing in civilian defense. Nor had he the burstingly informed look of a newspaperman, nor the impatient twitchings that indicate businessman, large or small.

This man, except for the regular raising of glass to mouth, sat as still as a chunk of granite. The resemblance did not end there. His face and head had a rugged unfinished look, as if forty-odd years of life's hacking had not yet chiseled them down to more conventional outlines. His hair was thick and russet, almost the color of the leather seat upon which he leaned. He wore a wrinkled gray seersucker suit.

The clue to his importance was certainly in the actions of the white-coated Negro moving toward him with a round tray and its single highball glass. Although the train had been on its way only a short while this was the third time the bartender personally had woven through the crowd with a drink for the tired man. His routine was always the same. He picked up the empty glass and industriously polished the table. He placed a clean doily and ash tray upon it. Then with a flourish he set the fresh drink, ice cubes clinking against its sides, in the exact center of the doily. Finally he stepped back and surveyed the object of these ministrations. There were now a couple of dozen before-lunch drinkers hanging onto the bar and clamoring for him, but he paid no attention.

After a moment he said, "What in the world's the matter with you, Mr. Bonbright?"

The tired man opened his eyes. They were gray like his suit and at the moment just as wilted-looking. He waved his forefinger warningly back and forth. "It's a government secret, Harry," he whispered. "I'm relaxing."

Harry shook his head. He peered at the lines and circles writing their message of weariness in his idol's face.

"I haven't seen you for three months. You been in Washington all that time, Mr. Bonbright?"

The tired man nodded.

"That's too big a dose of Washington. I know the signs. I seen people come out with their eyelids stuck together like yours. You better get somewhere and sleep, Mr. Bonbright. You been working too hard." He started to go and came back. "Where you on your way to now, Mr. Bonbright?" he asked, and then with exaggerated politeness, "If it's not a government secret."

"It's no secret." Tom Bonbright raised his glass, and the highball flowed rapidly down his throat. "I'm on my way to meet the six most beautiful chorus girls in New York City."

"Yeah?" Harry's eyes rolled. "That don't sound very restful."

He took his tray and pushed back to the bar. Several orders were shouted at him at once, and he got furiously busy setting out the glasses and ice. Behind him were shelves of bottles and, swinging from a tack in the woodwork, a framed cartoon. It was a drawing of Harry, his black face glistening as he shook up a cocktail for a very thirsty gent whose tongue lolled out of his mouth. This thirsty gent looked distinctly like the tired man at the front end of the car. Sprawled across one corner of the picture was an inked signature. It read: "Tom Bonbright," the *T* and *B* dwarfing the rest of the letters.

Two of Harry's customers perceived all this with interest. One of them was a short stocky man with untidily combed black hair and quizzical eyebrows that seemed to be pasted against his head in permanent triangles. His shirt collar was frayed, and he wore a loud diamond-patterned blue suit, worn-looking and shiny. He was nursing his one drink along, as if paying for a second might not be easy. The other customer who was interested in the cartoon was a shrewd-looking gentleman whose silvery hair fell straight from a center part to the top of his ears. This and his high stiff collar gave him the look of an aged gay-nineties blade. He reached over and pulled the bartender's sleeve.

"Is that fellow you were serving before Tom Bonbright, the cartoonist?"

Harry bobbed his head.

"Yes sir, Senator, that's him."

The man with the triangular eyebrows slid his glass back and forth between his hands. He smiled at the senator.

"Quite a personality, Mr. Bonbright."

The senator nodded. "He's more than a personality. He's a power. I wonder if anyone realizes the amount of influence that man has——"

"I think some people do. My name's Tally. Roger Tally. You're Senator Carlinger, aren't you?" Tally held out his hand and peered into the other's face.

"Glad to know you." Senator Carlinger's face was blank as he returned the handshake, but after a long moment his eyes gleamed with comprehension. He laughed a little falteringly. "I—I guess you know whereof you speak, Mr. Tally."

Tally seemed pleased that he had been recognized. "We have something in common, don't we, Senator? Maybe we ought to organize." He took a hasty sip from his glass. "The Association of Cartoon Corpses. Do you suppose Bonbright makes a nick in his pencil for each of us he knocks off?"

Senator Carlinger's expression turned definitely cool. He took his drink in one hand and a bowl of popcorn in the other and, giving Tally a quick nod, he started toward the front end of the car.

"Oh lord!" The exclamation came from Harry, who had stopped juggling glasses to watch him.

"What's the matter?" asked Tally.

"Why can't they all leave Mr. Bonbright in peace?" murmured Harry. "He's too wore out for an argument."

Tally glanced quickly about. No one was paying the least attention to him. His tone was casual when he spoke. "Where's Mr. Bonbright going in New York, do you know?"

Harry shrugged. "Can't say I do. He talks like he's been made judge of a bathing-girl contest. But, oh my, he's in a poor condition for it!"

Tom Bonbright would have described his condition with a stronger word than poor. It was a condition of complete exhaustion and complete misgiving. About the exhaustion Harry was right. He had had a big dose of Washington. Except for two business trips to New York, he had worked continuously in the Capital for seven months. He had been jostled and pushed and made to stand in line for everything from a bus ride to a cup of coffee. His offices had been moved six times, his slightest jotting typed up in quadruplicate, his secretary changed weekly. He had heard all the behind-the-hand rumors in the cocktail rooms and eaten all the tasteless two-fifty dinners in all the restaurants. He had pushed his way into movies, into drugstores, into taxicabs, until it came as a shock to him when he found he didn't have to push his way into bed. Finally the heat came. The city stood like a huge glistening white oven. Perspiration dripped off of Tom's face and onto his board, smudging his drawings. He began to work like a madman to finish his job; in the back of his head the vision of cool green Mount Sokosu in New Hampshire, his cabin padlocked and waiting at its foot, glimmered like a mirage.

He finished the job all right and he did it well. The men in the Office of Pictorial Propaganda had slapped him on the back and made quite a fuss about it. It was great work, they said; it was a great contribution. Tom himself had a feeling of huge satisfaction as he thought of the thousands of folders of matches, the packages of soap and shoelaces, each bearing its communication in the international language of pictures. The bundles were ready now to be dropped from the planes, and the people who were to pick them up—were they Norwegian, Dutch, or French—should have no difficulty in understanding the message he was sending them. A message that, the OPP hoped, would be as fatal as a bombshell—to the enemy.

But Tom's vision of the cabin and the mountain remained a vision. For when this job was done he was immediately assigned to a bond-selling tour. When his boss had put it up to him he had argued that he would rather do anything else, that he simply wasn't charming enough to make personal appearances. But his boss pointed out that all the necessary charm would be furnished by the troupe's master of ceremonies, the vibrant-voiced star of the English stage, Rupert Wells. But, Tom had insisted, he was used to mingling with people, not appearing before them. He was used to projecting his ideas through cartoons, not from a platform in the glare of spotlights.

In the end he had to accept the invitation. His boss, a man of rare talent for persuasion, had made the tour sound like a lark.

"You won't have any work," he said. "All you'll have to do is come out and let people see what you look like. You're a celebrity, you know."

Tom winced at the word. "What do you mean I won't have any work?" he pleaded. "The syndicate's renewed my contract, you know. I'm back on the old schedule—a cartoon a day. Don't you call that work?"

"Now, Tom, those little scribbles you dash off on how to run the nation? You've been doing that long enough to have it down to a system. Besides, man, I'm offering you the chance of a lifetime. This fellow Ross from the Theater Committee says he's signed up the six most beautiful chorus girls in New York City to go along. Aren't you human?"

Even now the thought of the girls brought Tom no consolation. He decided that his morale was very, very low. Another drink might fix that.

He was about to signal Harry when someone put a bowl of popcorn on his table and slid into the seat beside him.

"Hello, Bonbright."

Tom looked up in surprise at the sharp-featured face his pen had traced so often, noticing that the smile beneath the beaked nose was not at all reflected in the man's round eyes. He sighed. In their reactions to cartoons about themselves people fall into three classes: the high-dudgeoned who want to murder the cartoonist, the "good sports" who secretly are wounded to the core, and the publicity hounds who adore it. The senator obviously belonged to the middle and most difficult class.

"Hello, Senator," Tom said. He heard the hiss of a whisper at the next table and was aware of the heads turning toward them.

"So you recognize me, eh?" The senator let out a soft chuckle from somewhere behind his stiff collar. "That's more than I can say about myself in those funnies you drew. Gave my wife nightmares, some of them." He helped himself to the popcorn and motioned to Tom to have some. "Not that I can't take a joke, you understand."

The hurt in his tone annoyed Tom. He wanted to say, Oh, stop being such a good fellow. It wasn't a joke. You weren't reelected and I worked hard to make sure you weren't.

Senator Carlinger chewed his popcorn briskly. "You made me out a pretty low customer at times, didn't you? I gathered my charms added up to less than those of a boa constrictor. Understand now, I'm not a vain man. I didn't care what you did to my face. It's what you did to my ideas——"

"They were your ideas, weren't they, Senator?"

"They were. Good, honest, heartfelt ideas. Your insinuations were utterly false. I felt a man like you would take the time to examine my past record, to ascertain that I was sincere——"

"I knew you were sincere. That's what made you so dangerous. You were no crackpot. When you said something people listened to you." Tom lifted his glass and let the ice cubes slide against his lips. "I made it clear that my insinuations had nothing to do with you but only with the company you kept. Your so-called friends were using you and your reputation for a front. Was I right?"

The senator's smile was rueful. "You knew precisely what was going to happen to me. What do you carry around? A crystal ball?"

Tom shrugged and looked at his empty glass. The senator's eyes followed his and he beckoned to a waiter and ordered Tom another drink.

"That," he said, "is in the nature of a bribe. I want you to tell me how you do it. You draw a picture and I get more letters about it from my constituents than I do after making a speaking tour all over the state. How come?"

"Trade secret, sir. But I'll exchange a little information with you. I'm off on a speaking tour myself and I never made a speech in my life. Now you tell me how it's done."

"What sort of a tour?"

"Bond-selling. Two and three meetings a day."

"What a chance for a politician. Sure you aren't one?" The senator's owlish eyes darted all over Tom's face.

"Nope. That's why I'm stoking myself with scotch. I'm scared."

At this moment Harry himself arrived at their table with Tom's drink. He bent over toward the senator.

"Mr. Kenyon said to deliver you a message that he's waiting for you in the diner, sir."

"Oh yes." The senator put a bill down on Harry's tray and stood up. "I'm not one to advise you about speeches, Bonbright. As a result of my last ones I'm in the market for a job."

Tom was embarrassed. "But I thought——"

"Oh, I hung around Washington for a while, but nothing happened. They don't like fellows who guess wrong." He shrugged his shoulders in a gesture of bitterness. "I just got an offer from Lawrence Kenyon. Law firm's called Kenyon, Parker, and Camp, in Detroit. Ever hear of them?"

Tom shook his head.

"I'm not going to take it, but anyway——" He held out his hand and Tom rose to grasp it. "Drop in if you get to the home town, won't you?" And then with that same lower-face smile he said the phrase that Tom knew he had been saving for just this occasion: "See you in the funny papers."

He wove his way quickly through the car.

In the station Tom took Charlie Ross's letter out of his pocket and consulted it again. His vision was blurred after his long sojourn in the club car, but he managed to make out the typing.

> The first run-through of the show [he read] will be at the Carter Theater at four o'clock, Friday. At that time you will meet the other members of the troupe and we will try to decide on the best spot for you in the performance. We'll want to rehearse on Saturday and Sunday before we leave. . . .

Tom looked up just in time to see a man with the senator signal to a cab. The man was heavy-set, with a florid, contented face and teeth of a startling whiteness. He wore an expensive-looking slant-brimmed panama, and the luggage the driver pitched into the front seat was the very best pigskin. Evidently the law firm of Kenyon, Somebody, and Somebody did all right. Tom wondered fleetingly why the senator hadn't been more enthusiastic about a tie-up like that.

He got into the next cab and gave the driver the address of the Carter Theater. The sunlighted crowded streets swam before his eyes. He really didn't feel up to meeting six gorgeous girls.

He set down his bag and let the door to the theater auditorium click quietly shut behind him. Blinking in the darkness, he fumbled his way across the aisle and into a seat. There was a silhouetted row of watchers down in front. On the stage, bare except for two straight chairs and a bucket, a girl was performing some kind of love scene with a gray-haired actor. Tom recognized the actor's clipped syllables as Rupert Wells's. The first thing he thought of when he looked at the girl was that he'd like to draw her.

There was a striking quality of alertness about her face that projected all the way back to him, and an unusual modeling of the features. Her cheekbones were high above hollowed cheeks, and she had a straight arrogant nose that she kept pointed out in front of her like a nervous setter's. A mass of black hair streamed after her as she bounded across the stage. This high-voltage acting obviously distracted her partner. With an exasperated gesture he tossed his cigarette into the bucket. He turned toward the center of the front row.

"Mr. Ross, these lines just won't act. You'll have to get the author to put something else in here."

Mr. Ross's voice, eager and respectful, came up out of the darkened theater.

"Okay, Mr. Wells, okay. I'll get hold of him this evening. You just tell me what's the matter."

"The matter? Ask the chap who he thinks I am—Mickey Rooney? My own son's twenty-two years old, and I dare say he makes love with more sense than this. And also"—his voice became cuttingly courteous as he turned to the girl beside him—"aren't you being a bit too animated, Miss Hathaway?"

The stuffy air in the theater made Tom drowsy. The figures on the stage seemed to shrink to unreality, as if he were viewing them through the wrong end of opera glasses. Miss Hathaway, he reflected; there was to be an actress on the tour named Helen Hathaway. He had never heard of her and now he wondered why. Miss Hathaway had a lot to give the customers.

He felt the small movement of the air as someone brushed by in back of him, and then came the creak of a seat being lowered. As he half turned to see who it was, something crashed down on his skull. He was conscious for an instant of unbearable pounding pain. Then, as blackness settled over him, he slumped into the aisle.

2

FOR ONE LONG, GLORIOUS MOMENT Tom thought that he had awakened in heaven and, times being what they are, it was proper that the décor in Paradise be red, white, and blue. The walls of this particular cubicle, at least twenty feet square, were a deep sky blue. Red-and-white-striped curtains flowed from a huge corner window. The furniture was white. The lighting came from nowhere that he could discover at first glance, which was proper also. It was not lighting. It was illumination. He was lying on a most unusual bed, as wide as it was long. At the far side he saw a table with a silver carafe on it: nectar. With luxurious abandon Tom rolled over and over toward the table. His disillusionment came from two sources at once. In the first place, there was also a bottle of aspirin on the table. In the second place, the sound of a high voice came from the next room. It belonged to a very earthly angry female.

"Listen, Charlie, I tell you I don't like the idea of those six hoofers in the show. They'll spoil everything."

A man's voice, calm and placating, answered her. "But, Helen dear, how do they interfere? They tap dance on and they tap dance off; that's all."

Tom heard the bubbling sound of a siphon bottle. The girl's voice was tense and controlled when she spoke again.

"Now look here, Charlie, I hired you to press-agent me, didn't I? We're both after the same thing, aren't we? We both want to promote Helen Hathaway." She said the name, Tom thought, as if she had dreams for it. "It isn't going to help me any to have a lot of cheesecake confusing my public."

"But, dear, I have nothing to say about it. Washington picked the people for the tour. After all, their main idea is to sell war bonds."

"All right. That's my main idea too. But is there anything wrong in selling me along with the bonds? If I could just get the chance to show what I can do——"

"You are getting a chance, dear. You've got the dramatic skit with Wells and this big song number."

The girl's voice was stubborn. "I can put the song over without any tap dancers. Why don't they go over to the canteen and dance? We've got enough oddities along on this tour already."

Tom propped himself up on his elbows. He heard her heels thud quickly over the rug, and there was the rasp of a match being lighted.

"Talking about freaks—what are we going to do with Sleeping Beauty in there?"

"He's a big shot, dear, and you might as well get it through your noodle. Without him we wouldn't have this tour——"

"What's he going along as? Excess baggage?"

"Helen dear, you don't seem to understand. He's the major attraction. He—not Rupert Wells. He's been drawing a cartoon every day for years, and millions of people see them. Even you must see them. On the editorial page?"

"I don't have time for the editorial page."

"Half the people in this country turn to the Bonbright cartoons before they look at anything else in their papers. The public is nuts for him, dear. He puts ideas into their noggins. Big ideas."

Tom smiled contentedly and waited for more.

"Is that so?" The girl's voice was mocking. "He's put one idea into mine already. He's a souse. And unreliable."

Tom sat up and pushed himself off the bed. A big pickax beat at the side of his head and he groaned softly. He reached up to finger the lump, now good-sized and sensitive, and his thoughts skipped back to the afternoon in the Carter Theater. He was sure of one thing: he had not, as this dame in the next room supposed, passed out from the effects of too much liquor. From forty years of acquaintance with himself he knew that was a distinct impossibility. Besides, there was no question about what had happened. Someone had socked him on the head. Hard. Dangerous places, theaters—he knew he should have kept out of them. He wanted to think things over, but he felt too miserable now. His mouth and throat seemed full of cotton batting. Someone had removed his shoes, and his big toe pushed through a hole in his sock. He knelt down, holding his head carefully upright, and began to feel around for his shoes.

The man was making a long speech now, and the last few words penetrated into the bedroom:

". . . I can't kick those six girls out because you say so—as if you were a big temperamental star or something. You're still comparatively unknown, if you see what I mean, dear."

"I see what you mean. That's why I engaged your expensive services, Mr. Ross."

"Listen, I've got an idea. We'll take them out of that song number with you and put them in this Tom Bonbright's. I'm sure he won't complain, and they'll dress up his act a little."

"With a face like that, he needs some dressing up!"

Tom stopped his wanderings before a vanity table. He peered into the mirror and ran his hand appraisingly over his face. Then with one hesitant glance at his torn sock he marched toward the door and into the next room.

The girl was lying on a couch, her feet propped up on its arm. She was dressed in a flowered blouse and bright green slacks.

All the light in the room seemed to glisten on her hair, on her red mouth, on the smooth, angular lines of her face. She looked even more electric than she had on the stage. Charlie, a short snub-nosed curly-haired young man, was sitting at a safe distance across the room from her. Tom looked from one to the other and decided that Charlie would be the most likely.

"Pardon me," he said, "but have you a needle and thread?"

After Charlie had pumped his hand and introduced him to Miss Hathaway and told him how he had passed out in the theater—from the heat, no doubt—and mixed him a drink, Tom felt better. He forgot about the pickax in his head as he listened to Charlie explain how they had found him in the aisle and brought him here with the help of a taxi driver and how they'd gotten him to bed and put cold cloths on him and removed his shoes.

"How does your head feel now, Mr. Bonbright?" asked Charlie. "You gave it an awful whack against one of the seats. Helen thought we should take you to a hospital."

Tom's hand groped again toward the bump on his skull. So that's how they explained it.

Charlie lowered his voice to a confidential tone. "If we went to a hospital I knew we took a chance of reporters and questions. I thought it was better to bring you up here to rest for a while. Helen was terribly upset."

Tom's eyes followed Charlie's to Miss Hathaway's face. It was frozen.

"About me?" he asked, and then with what he hoped was touching gratitude: "Now, say, that's very kind of you."

Miss Hathaway snorted and reached for a cigarette. She got up from the couch and with that quick, springy stride Tom had noticed on the stage walked across the room to the long uncurtained french windows. Through them Tom could see the tops of near-by buildings looming black against the red summer sunset. Miss Hathaway knelt on the window seat, the smoke from her cigarette wafting slowly past her face. It was a face, Tom decided, to cause arguments. Was she beautiful or wasn't she? He could imagine himself debating on either side.

Charlie began to explain about the others going along on the Caravan. Besides Miss Hathaway and Mr. Bonbright himself, there were Rupert Wells, the English actor, the Castle Theater Chorus, and a college girl named Nadine Hall who had just won a national contest for the best war song of World War II. They had had one more person scheduled. A man to be introduced as the Typical American Home-front Hero. He was a factory worker who could run a riveting machine faster than anyone else in the country. But at the last minute his plant had decided he was too valuable to be spared. Charlie's main problem during the next week was to find a home-front hero important enough to be in the Caravan but not too important to leave his job.

"I take it," said Tom, "that you will come along as manager of the tour, Mr. Ross."

Charlie's slick little face lighted. "Call me the errand boy, Mr. Bonbright. I'm supposed to get hotel rooms and check the baggage and keep track of the timetables. You know the sort of thing. It's a nuisance, but I'm glad to do it. We all have to volunteer something these days."

So he's not getting paid, thought Tom, regarding him closer. Even in a linen suit that had been around New York all day Charlie looked trim and shined up. His tie matched the handkerchief that blossomed out of his breast pocket. His legs were crossed, and Tom could see the sole of one white shoe. It had not been bought very long ago. Evidently Miss Hathaway paid him generously—and why not? It was a very clever bit of press-agenting the two of them had figured out. Through the unselfish device of selling war bonds, Miss Hathaway's face and figure and voice were to be made known to hundreds of thousands of Americans. It certainly made a better impression than getting into the proper columns—or beds.

Charlie was still talking about finding a home-front hero. He didn't want to get anyone from a plant. The Caravan was going to visit factories, and all those people knew what a factory worker looked like. They wanted to see something else for a change.

Tom felt privately that Miss Hathaway was going to be enough change for them all by herself.

"By the way, Mr. Ross," he asked, "just what kind of an act do you have scheduled for me?"

Charlie leaned forward. "It's a knockout, Mr. Bonbright. You're our star performer, see?—and we're going to do the thing right. We're going to get you a pad of paper about six feet square, so everyone can see it. Then you take a black crayon and make drawings to illustrate your talk."

"What do I say?"

"That's up to you. Then the girls will put the pad down and go out into the audience——"

"What girls?"

"The Castle Theater Chorus. We'll have them dance in and hold up the pad while you draw, see? Then they'll go out into the audience to get people to pose for you. Then these people will buy their caricatures from you by buying a bond. Get what I mean?"

Charlie's question was addressed to Tom, but his eyes were on Miss Hathaway.

Tom remembered the conversation he had overheard a few minutes before. Neither of these two gave any indication that it had existed. There was only Charlie's silent request for approval now and Tom's own toe resting nakedly on the thick cream-colored rug to prove to him it had. He felt very wide awake and refreshed, and an intense curiosity about this Miss Hathaway took hold of him.

He realized he was waiting for Charlie to leave. Just as he was figuring how it could be accomplished Charlie solved it for him. He jerked his arm up and around so that his coat sleeve, pulled back, revealed a shiny new wrist watch.

"I've got to scram," he announced. "I've got to get hold of that playwright and convince him the great lover has aged."

Helen looked up, her face bright with interest.

"Mr. Wells is sensitive about that, isn't he? I wonder if he feels he's slipping."

"Naw." Charlie picked up a brown straw hat with a pleated yellow band. "He's bigger stuff than ever with all the young guys in the Army. His own son was shaping up into good competition for him—and now he's in the R.A.F. Listen, dear, the old adage still holds good. Anyone who gets to play opposite Wells is made. Wait till the audiences get a look at you."

Charlie turned to Tom. "The American public knows something good when they see it. I have great faith in the American public."

You and me both, thought Tom; only it's easier to sell what you're selling. Then he thought, I could learn things from this fellow maybe.

Charlie looked back at them once from the door. "See you tomorrow at the theater. Sorry to run out on you like this, Mr. Bonbright."

Tom's voice was probably too enthusiastic as he answered. "That's okay, Mr. Ross, old man; that's okay."

Miss Hathaway began to walk about the room, gathering up the empty glasses. She did not ask Tom if he wanted another drink. Tom decided that he didn't want one anyway. He ran his toe carefully over the nap of the carpet.

"Got anything in the icebox?"

"What sort of thing?"

"To eat."

"Really, I have no idea."

"Really? Don't you ever look in your icebox?"

"Not if I can help it. I'm afraid I'm not very domestic."

"You don't have to be domestic to look in the icebox. Just not blind."

"Well, I don't think I have any snacks."

"Snacks, hell. I want a dinner. I know a place not far from here where we could both get a good dinner."

She stopped her wandering about the room and looked at him, sizing him up. He thought he could read the calculation flitting across her face.

"It's a very small place," he said. "There won't be a single reporter or photographer or casting director there. If you come it will have to be for love of me alone."

"If I come it will be because I'm hungry."

"Do you always do things for the practical reason? For instance, why are you so hell-bent on getting into the big lights—if you can pay the rent for all this right now?" Tom made an expansive gesture to take in the apartment.

"So you think I'm going to get into the big lights?"

"Lady, how can you miss? You're not too finicky to let patriotism pay off in publicity and you've got the face. Unbeatable combination."

The corners of her mouth twitched, and she smiled a wide smile full of disdain.

"I see you're not too finicky to eavesdrop on other people's private conversations."

"That's how I find out all I know. Now what about eating?"

"I've got to dress first. Should I put tape over the keyhole?"

Tom reached for a newspaper on the end table.

"I think Thompson, Lippmann, and Bonbright will keep me busy until you're ready."

She went into the bedroom and slammed the door.

Tom lay back comfortably on the couch and opened the paper. A featured story and picture on the front page caught his eye.

TANKER TORPEDOED OFF CAPE COD COAST
HEROIC CIVILIAN RESCUES SIX SEAMEN

DANIEL STOCK BATTLES FLAMES TO SAVE LIVES
IN DARING RESCUE OF SIX

Just what Charlie is looking for, he thought. There's a home-front hero for him.

3

JOE, the big scar-faced Italian who owned the resturant around the corner, greeted Tom with a clap on the back that catapulted him into the small low-ceilinged room, a room full of loud talk and good smells.

"Where you been all this time, Tommy, my boy? If I think you been in New York eatin' somewhere else I finish you off right now." He laughed raucously and pounded Tom's shoulder.

"Listen, Joe," said Tom, "you owe me so much money I can't afford to eat anywhere else. This is Miss Hathaway. Get us a nice quiet table, will you?"

"Plenty your friends come over tonight," said Joe. "Boys from the *News* been askin' for you. Boys from the AP in number-two booth there."

As he led them through the room Tom was hailed with several hellos, and eyebrows lifted enthusiastically toward Helen, but he steered her firmly into the empty booth Joe had chosen for them. She sat down and took off her hat. She was smiling.

"Well," he said, "maybe there are a few reporters here, but honestly, no producers."

"That's the second time you've said that. You think you know all about me, don't you?"

The waiter came and Tom ordered a bottle of chianti and two spaghetti dinners. Helen didn't stop him.

"Now I do know something about you," he said. "You're not the kind of female who demands salads all the time like a damn cow."

Helen was looking at the walls of the room covered with framed cartoons and drawings.

"Your handwork?"

"Most of them. Joe's a great collector. I figure he owes me all the money he's saved on paint for the walls."

"Who's the thin man?"

She pointed to a caricature hanging above their booth. The sketch was cleverly done in black and white of a long, lanky fellow with a prominent Adam's apple and an upstanding shock of hair above an enormous eyeshade.

"That's Bill Roberts, rewrite man on the *News Telegraph.* A swell guy. We did a book together about a year ago. What were you reading a year ago?"

"*Variety* and the bulletin board at Equity."

"Then you wouldn't remember our book. It was about the Tally plan."

"I remember that racket. Two Rolls-Royces in every garage. A pheasant in every pot. Some kind of get-rich-quick scheme, wasn't it?"

Tom reached for the wicker basket of rolls. "Nobody in it got rich but Roger Tally. He rooked his million followers out of lots of hard-earned dough before we held him up to the light. Bill wrote the copy. I did the cartoons. When we got published—no more Tally."

Joe was ambling past them, and Tom called to him to come over.

"What'sa matter now, Tommy? You tell me what you want; I get it. Don't tell me you want a steak though." He laughed at the joke, rocking back and forth on his feet.

"How's Bill Roberts, Joe? Have you seen him lately?"

"That skinny redhead friend of yours! He was in here last night with a real lady too. He sat right here where you're sittin'. What'sa matter?—you two guys all of a sudden get real lady friends!" Joe winked at Helen and hurried off.

The rest of the meal went well enough. They talked mostly about the theater, since Miss Hathaway's mind wandered away from practically every other subject. She had seen all the current Broadway shows and knew all the latest backstage tidbits. She was frankly escapist entertainment, and Tom would have enjoyed it thoroughly, except for the throbbing pain where he had been struck on the head.

After their dessert he excused himself and made a phone call. Bill Roberts' voice came over the wire, full of surprise and welcome.

"It's the first time I've been in town for months," Tom explained. "I thought I'd stop in and see you tonight—if you're not busy or having other company."

"I've got other company all right—someone you know very well. You must come over, and we'll have a reunion and a drink." Bill sounded extremely amused. "Hurry up."

"I'm bringing what Joe calls a 'real lady' with me."

"Sure, bring her. I think I have four glasses."

Tom explained to Helen that he just wanted to stop to see Bill for a minute, as he didn't know when he'd be in New York again.

"We'll stay long enough for one drink," he said, "then we'll go to a nice cool movie."

Helen agreed but not without suspicion. "I never heard of a newspaperman who stopped with one drink," she told him, "and, besides, from what I saw of you this afternoon——"

"Oh yes." Tom settled back in his seat and watched the smoke from his cigarette winding toward the ceiling. "I forgot to tell you—you and Charlie were mistaken about me this afternoon. I didn't pass out from drinking. Someone got behind me in the theater and slammed me over the head with a lead pipe."

If he expected her to be startled he was disappointed. She looked at him with a calm expression of admiration.

"I've heard a lot of alibis in my time," she said, "but that is really a fresh variation."

Tom shrugged. "All the same, I came near getting killed. Somebody's going to catch hell for giving me a headache like this."

"Who would want to do it? Charlie assured me you're America's sweetheart."

"It was a case of mistaken identity, I hope. You don't know any feuding actors, do you?"

"Yes. But you couldn't possibly be mistaken for either of them."

"That's another thing. My face. What's the matter with my face?" He put some money down on the bill tray and slid out of the booth to get her coat, not giving her a chance to answer.

There was a police squad car in front of Bill Roberts' apartment and a rapidly growing crowd of people around the entrance. Tom and Helen joined the crowd.

"What's going on?" Tom asked a young fellow carrying a bag of groceries.

The young man's eyes were listless. "Aw, I don't know. There's always something." He pummeled vigorously against the people ahead of him, trying to reach the entrance of the apartment. Tom grabbed Helen and plunged after him. Their guide had sharp elbows and a lot of determination. In a few minutes they were at the doorway. A policeman barred the way.

"Aw gee." The young man thrust forward his brown paper bag. "My wife's up there waiting for me. We ain't had dinner yet."

"Sorry." The policeman shook his head. "Orders are no one is to go in or out. There's been a murder in there. Fellow name of Roberts." He stared hard at the young man. "You know him?"

Tom felt Helen's fingers tighten on his arm. He said, "I know a Mr. Roberts who lives here, officer. I spoke to him on the phone a few minutes ago. We're on our way to see him now."

"That so?" The policeman pointed up the stairs. "You better go up there then. Sergeant Boyd will want to see you."

"Aw gee," grumbled the young man as they went through the door. "This is the second time there's been a murder in this apartment since I moved in."

"That so?" The policeman reached in his pocket for a pencil. "And what's your name, may I ask?"

Up in the apartment Sergeant Boyd pulled the sheet back from the dead man's face so Tom could identify him. It was Bill Roberts all right, thin, shrewd-faced even in death, the shock of red hair springing up from his scalp like brush bristles.

Tom nodded his head, and the sheet was put in place again, but one of Bill's bony hands hung limply below it. Suddenly weak, Tom sat down in the shabby old Morris chair where he had sat so often talking things over with Bill, and asked for a drink of water.

The water was warm from the tap, but it helped. The room looked real again, and Helen could not be part of any nightmare. Her slender face was drained of color and her eyes looked dark and large. She was shaking her head, and then Tom realized that Boyd was questioning her, and naturally she didn't know any of the answers.

"Miss Hathaway never met Mr. Roberts," Tom said aloud. "He was my friend. I spoke with him over the phone at about eight o'clock this evening."

"Will you repeat the conversation, Mr. Bonbright?" requested the sergeant, and when Tom had done so he asked, "Have you any idea whom he was talking about? Who was with him at the time?"

"Not the slightest idea. I was only mildly curious and didn't think to question him. As a matter of fact, I rather thought he meant a girl."

One of the other detectives said, "I don't think so. Not a trace of lipstick on the glasses. Nothing but cigars in the ash trays."

The sergeant continued with his routine questions, but Tom couldn't help him with either a motive or a suspect.

"What about this reunion business?" insisted Boyd. "Wasn't there someone who used to hang around the two of you? Someone you haven't seen for a long time?"

Tom frowned, trying to think. "We had dozens of friends in common—but no one was closer to us than another. I—I did have the feeling he meant a girl."

"Could you explain why?"

"There was something about the way he laughed when he said, 'Someone you know very well.' He sounded as if I wouldn't be too pleased about it."

"Why do you think he told you to *hurry up* and come over? Was he being threatened at that moment perhaps? Did he sound frightened?"

"No." Tom looked helplessly at the sergeant. "I can't honestly say he did. Bill was that sort of a guy. He was always in a hurry about everything."

The sergeant flipped his notebook shut and stood up.

"You can go now if you want to, Mr. Bonbright. Thanks very much. Where can I reach you during the next few days?"

"I'll be in town at the Gormley until Sunday night. After that I'm going on a bond-selling tour for a couple of weeks. You can reach me at any time through the OPP in Washington."

"Okay. Thank you, too, Miss Hathaway."

Helen nodded gravely, and Tom noticed that some of what he supposed they called "the starch" was taken out of her. She seemed quite clinging and dependent on his arm as they made their way through the crowd again.

They took a taxi back uptown.

Tom apologized: "I'm sorry you had to be dragged all through that."

Helen was lying back against the seat. The breeze through the windows lifted the hair softly away from her face.

"I'm sorry about your friend. He sounded like a fine person."

"He was the kind we need the most these days. A real human being. A real fighter." The bitter moisture gathered in Tom's eyes. "I'll miss him. The whole country will miss him, whether it knows it or not. May I take you home? I'm afraid I couldn't stand a movie now."

She nodded with sympathy.

"What I can't understand," continued Tom, "is who would want to shoot a swell guy like Bill."

"He wasn't shot."

"He wasn't!"

"No." She mimicked with startling accuracy the voice of Sergeant Boyd. "He was slugged at the base of the skull with a heavy object and died of concussion."

"Good God," Tom murmured. He passed his hands roughly over his eyes.

Helen turned to him. It was too dark for him to see her face, but her voice was shaky with excitement. "Boyd asked me a lot of questions, but he didn't ask me the right one. I know who did it and I owe you an apology."

"Now wait a minute; I don't follow you."

"You weren't lying this afternoon. You were hit over the head. By the same man that killed Bill Roberts."

"Lady, you've got a natural plot sense. You're clever but crazy."

"I'm not going to tell you his name yet. I have to do a little research. Some reading—political reading."

"Quite a departure from the usual, isn't it?"

The taxi drew up to the entrance of her building, and she sprang out quickly. "Yes," she said, "but then so are you, Mr. Bonbright."

Tom directed the taxi to the Carter Theater. It was dark and deserted, the doors locked. The nearest sign of life was a fruit-and-candy stall a few yards down the street. A thin old man with a bedraggled yellowish mustache sat on a stool behind the counter listening to a radio. Tom sauntered over and bought an apple and a package of mints. He glanced at the old man.

"Were you open this afternoon?" he asked casually.

"Yep. I open at noon every day." The old man pulled out a drawer and tossed the coins inside it.

"A friend of mine was supposed to meet me in front of the theater this afternoon. I missed him somehow. I wonder if you saw him standing around?"

"That theater's been closed all summer."

"I know. We were using it for a rehearsal. My friend is short and stocky. His hair's usually mussed up, and he wears a loud blue suit. He's a great one for fancy patterns in his suits."

The old man sucked some air between his teeth. "I dunno if I seen him or not. All you actors look the same to me." His attention turned back to the radio.

Tom walked down the street munching his apple. It had been a very long shot, but just the same the noncommittal fruit-stall man disappointed him. He had noticed a fellow on the train standing at the bar, and something in the angle of his head, in the shape of his body, had seemed to recall Roger Tally. Tom blinked his eyes, trying to make the focus of his memory come sharp, but he couldn't be sure. It was a wild idea—as wild as Helen Hathaway. He smiled, thinking how she had hit on the same theory, of the conviction in her voice as she had spoken it.

Tom turned the corner and walked toward the News Telegraph Building. It seemed as if Bill's high, earnest voice were speaking to him again: "We've got to blow this Tally racket sky high. He's worse than a plain thief. He not only steals people's money; he steals their hopes too." Yes, thought Tom, he'd go up to the office and talk to somebody about Bill Roberts. Maybe that would ease the sense of loss, the furious and frustrated impulse for revenge churning inside him.

4

ON THE rattling, dusty Cape Cod train, Charlie took all the clippings out of his pocket and read them over again. There were several large photographs of the hero, Daniel Stock, who had rescued the six burned seamen, and of his hired man, who had been with him at the time. The hired man, Jacob Card, looked like any weather-beaten Yankee fisherman, his eyes squinty beneath the long visor of his cap. The pictures of Stock taken by torchlight soon after the rescue showed nothing but a blackened, oil-soaked shape of a man being helped into an improvised ambulance. But there were other photographs evidently secured from Stock's home, and these held Charlie's attention. He studied them curiously for a while.

The papers referred to Stock as a fisherman and an artist; yet, according to Charlie's conceptions, he looked like neither. He had a blandly handsome face, smooth and open-looking, and thinning well-barbered hair. His eyes photographed a lighter color than his brows, and there was in them a benign, boyish expression. One picture showed him in a dark yachting-type cap and a striped jersey with a kerchief knotted about his neck. Charlie's ideas about artists were strictly Greenwich Village: long hair and short beards. This man had the appearance of a comfortable broker perhaps fifteen years out of college. On the other hand, he didn't look like a fisherman either. He looked like he might have come out of a prewar cruise-to-Bermuda ad.

Charlie gathered from the stories that Stock had proven to be a very retiring type of hero. Most of the accounts of the rescues were quoted from Card's words. The facts were these: the two men had spent the day fishing off the Cape coast. As they were coming home in the early evening they sighted a tanker a couple of miles from them, proceeding northward and alone. Suddenly, as they were watching, there was a tremendous explosion and a mountain of flames rose into the sky.

Card, with an unsuspected articulateness, described the scene. "The fire lit the water for miles around like the biggest sunset that ever happened," he told the reporters. "Mr. Stock started up full speed toward the tanker. When we got closer there were awful crashes, and we saw the aftermast broken to pieces athwart the stern. She was listing bad to starboard too. Mr. Stock kept on going, and I begged him to stop. Fireballs were pouring down out of the sky like it was Fourth of July, and little blobs of oil exploded all around us. I thought sure we'd catch fire ourselves any minute. We could see some of the men from the tanker holding to the nets they'd thrown over her side. A couple of lifeboats pulled away packed with men, but the fellows on the net dropped off one by one. By that time the oily water was on fire, too, and the flames raced all over it. Those fellows never had a chance.

"There were others swimming away from the tanker, though, and a couple of them got near enough so's we could throw them our ropes and pull them in. It was so hot where we were I couldn't keep my eyes open—had to keep my handkerchief over my face and peer out. Then I seen Mr. Stock putting on his jacket and buttoning it up. The next thing I know he'd dove off the boat. I thought he'd gone crazy. The oil on the water was enough to suffocate a body even if it didn't catch fire. Seems he'd spotted one of them rubber rafts with three men hanging onto it. They were all burned, no strength left in them. When he dragged them over I thought they were dead already. We had to tie them up and hist them into our boat. One of those fellows was the one that died on the way back.

"I yelled at Mr. Stock to climb in, but he didn't answer me. He was black with oil, and his lips were all gummy and stuck together. Next thing I know, he'd started out again. The water was sloshing oil right up on our sides. There were awful crashes and crackling coming from the tanker. In a few minutes I seen Mr. Stock swimming with another fellow. That was the youngster whose hands were burned so bad. Mr. Stock swam right up into the fire for him. He went back twice more like that to bring out those other two boys. When he finally let me pull him in he fell right down beside them like a corpse. I started up for Provincetown Harbor fast as I could. By that time the Coast Guard fellows were out there."

The two men who had first swum up to Stock's boat had witnessed the other rescues and given the same report. There were many expressions of gratitude and awe from them and from the men Stock had saved. The first mate, who had been hanging to the rubber raft, told a reporter that now he believed in Superman, and there were several editorials demanding a Congressional Medal of Honor for Stock and referring to his deed as the kind of battling on the home front which would help win the war. In the several hours that had elapsed since the torpedoing Daniel Stock has been made into the nation's most spectacular civilian hero to date. He was exactly what was needed to complete the OPP bond-selling Caravan. Charlie had called Washington and received an enthusiastic go-ahead.

He got off the train at Cove Point and inquired the way to Stock's house. A little boy rattled off directions.

"You a newspaperman?" he asked, his freckled face still full of the excitement that had hit the town.

"Not exactly." Charlie stared at the dusty beach road. The

July sun blazing on it made it seem to jig up and down. Stock lived four miles up, and Charlie was no long-distance hiker. "Any place to get a taxi around here?"

The boy shook his head. "No taxis. Not since there ain't any summer people any more."

Charlie regarded his new white shoes a moment and then started over toward the station. The boy kept right alongside of him.

"What you aimin' to do now?"

"Telephone Mr. Stock, I guess."

This was just what the youngster was waiting for. His voice was triumphant with the joy of imparting information.

"He ain't got a telephone."

Trickles of perspiration started up under the band of Charlie's brown straw hat. He couldn't quite believe in what he was in for.

"How do people get over to his house?"

"Walk. Or hire my bicycle."

"Okay." Charlie surveyed the flourishing little businessman at his side. "Where's your bike?"

The boy ran to the shady side of the station and brought out a two-wheeler.

"You just keep goin' up the beach road," he directed. "It's kind of sandy, so keep in the center. About four miles up there's a hill, and at the top two mailboxes—Jonathan Kalman's and Daniel Stock's—and a path that turns off. You better leave the bike and walk the rest of the way. It's the second house you come to. I charge a dollar for the bike."

It had been a lot of years since Charlie had pumped himself up and down the sidewalks of New York. He straddled the bicycle uncertainly and dug into his pocket. The boy's brown fist closed around the bill. "It's a good thing you ain't a newspaperman," he remarked genially. "Mr. Stock said newspapermen are a damn bother. He don't want to see no more of 'em."

By the time Charlie reached the two mailboxes his trousers were a dusty brown and his shirt stuck to his back like another skin. He parked the bike against the boxes and sat down to unlace his shoes. The sand he poured out of them made a mound on the grass. For a moment he stared at it, bewildered. What was he doing here anyway? His thoughts flashed resentfully back to Helen, clean and comfortable in New York.

When he had taken the job of being her press agent Charlie had never expected it would involve chasing to the seashore after citizens of the United States who didn't even have telephones. Of course he had never expected it would involve doing all the dirty work for a traveling show, either. On the other hand, there was that old saying that beggars can't be choosers, and he had been pretty shiny at the elbows until he ran into Helen. She was too lean and independent for Charlie's taste, but he had to admit she did attract attention. Besides, she had plenty of money and an ambition that almost scared him. She wouldn't stop at anything to get what she wanted. And, after all, what he wanted was his cut of what she wanted. Someday that wouldn't be hard to take. The thought of it cheered him and he stood up, careful not to abuse his screaming muscles, and started down the path. The sooner he saw Stock, the sooner he could get away from this fresh sea air and sunshine.

A lanky fellow in shorts and sneakers was spreading some clothes out to dry in front of the first house. When he saw Charlie he waved.

"Hi," he said. "Wonderful day, isn't it?"

Charlie smiled wanly.

"If you're going over to Stock's don't give up. You can see the roof from here."

Charlie peered ahead at the gray shingles just showing through the trees. He sighed.

"Say, could I trouble you for a drink of water?"

"Sure, come in."

The lanky fellow led the way through the door into the dim coolness of the front room. Charlie noticed the canvases stacked against the wall. He followed his host into the kitchen. "I thought that name sounded familiar," he said. "You're Jonathan Kalman, the painter. Say, I like your stuff."

Kalman smiled. "Thanks. That's always good to hear."

"Listen, I don't know anything about art. I just know what I like, as they say. The stuff in your pictures looks like what it's supposed to look like. No monkey business." He took the offered glass of water and glanced around at the whitewashed walls and bare wooden floor. "With what people pay you for your pictures, you don't *have* to live here, do you?"

"I like it. The same as Daniel Stock you're going to see. This is a great place when you get to know it."

Charlie went to the door. "I might be back sooner than you think. A kid in the village told me Stock's sick of people bothering him."

"Don't worry. He won't throw you out. He's very polite."

"What kind of a guy is he really? Could you tip me off?"

Kalman shrugged and went back to spreading out the wet clothes.

"We've been summer neighbors for about six years, and I can't tell you anything about him. That's the kind of a guy he is."

When Charlie arrived at Stock's house there was no one around. After a few cautious whistles he walked into the open door and sat down gratefully in a wicker chair. He took off his hat to fan himself and looked around. This house was just like Kalman's—same whitewashed walls and uneven bare floor. There was even a Kalman painting hanging over the fireplace. Charlie stared at it approvingly. White lighthouse, blue sea, and road curving up the yellow beach. It looked swell—better than it felt, he knew now from the afternoon's experience. He walked over to examine it closer, and then his eyebrows went up. The picture looked like a Kalman, but it wasn't. It was signed "D. Stock, 1940."

"Good afternoon. Are you waiting to see me?" The voice was soft but full of irritation.

Charlie whirled guiltily. A tall shaven-headed man stood in the doorway, his arms piled with wood.

"Mr. Stock?"

The man nodded. He crossed the room and let the wood tumble noisily into an open box. Charlie stared at the bandage taped to his neck and over one check. His handsome face was completely hairless—no brows and no lashes—and the shaven scalp looked very white and naked in contrast to the tanned skin beneath it.

"Say, I hope you'll excuse me for barging in like this. My name is Ross." Charlie held out his hand. "And maybe I'd better tell you right away that I am not a newspaperman."

Stock's handshake was painfully muscular. He took a cigarette from a box on the mantel and offered one to Charlie.

At this gesture Charlie gathered courage.

"I've come to see you, Mr. Stock," he said, "on behalf of the government of the United States." He started to laugh at himself for making so pretentious an announcement, but a look at Stock stopped him abruptly. He couldn't have explained what it was—the light green eyes protruding, the expression around the mouth. At any rate, he no longer felt in the mood for laughing.

"I—I see you're burned." Falteringly he changed the subject. "I—I want you to know we all think you did a great thing."

"Anyone would have done his best. I am fortunate to be an excellent swimmer. I did my best."

"Everybody in town—in New York—is talking about it."

"Then you are from New York? Not Washington?"

"Oh, I'm not really from the government," said Charlie.

"That was a joke, kind of. I'm from the East Coast Theater Committee, but I'm managing a bond-selling tour for one of the government agencies. You know, celebrities tour the country—people like Dorothy Lamour and Bob Hope—they entertain at rallies."

Stock nodded, and his eyes seemed to recede a little. Charlie felt relieved. "Well, you're a hero now, you know." He exerted himself to laugh this time. "And—we'd like you to come on our tour."

"Who'd like me to come?"

"The OPP—that's the agency sponsoring this one. They feel that seeing you and hearing what you've done would lift people's morale——" Charlie fidgeted, but Mr. Stock did not ask him to sit down.

"Where's the tour going?"

"We've got a circuit of big cities. Starts in Pittsburgh, goes as far west as Chicago, and doubles back to end in Boston."

Stock shook his head and walked to the door.

"I'm sorry. I couldn't possibly go. You may tell the OPP or whatever it is that I regret it very much."

Charlie knew he was being shown out, but he tried again.

"Won't you think it over at least, Mr. Stock? I know you've been through a bad experience—but that's why we need you so much. Mr. Bonbright said it would mean a lot to the people here at home to know that all the glory and chances for helping don't go with a uniform."

"Mr. who?" Stock didn't turn around. He seemed to be examining the cloudless blue sky.

"Tom Bonbright, the cartoonist. He's going on the tour with us. He read about you in the papers and suggested we ask you to come too."

Stock came back into the room then and sat down on a faded chintz-covered couch.

"What kind of a person is this Tom Bonbright?" he inquired. "I've been following his cartoons for years."

"He's great." Charlie picked up new hope and returned to the wicker chair. "He's got a personality like dynamite and yet he's kind of quiet."

"I've wondered about him. He has a tremendous following in this country."

"Sure he has, but he's not a bit swell-headed about it. Why, I bet he could run for—for something big—and win."

"I'm not so sure." Stock seemed to be taking the discussion very seriously. "He has a lot of enemies, you know. Not enemies precisely—but people who disagree with his ideas about the war and the government, that sort of thing."

"Could be." Charlie hoped his differing wouldn't bring that funny look back into this man's eyes. "But most of those people come around to finding out he's right after a while. Trouble is, he's always the first to see trouble. Then he gets called a lot of bad names until everybody catches up with him."

He could see the interest growing in Stock's face. "You'll enjoy getting to know Mr. Bonbright," he urged. He began to paint as vivid a picture as he could of the plans for the two-week tour. The annoyance smoothed out of Stock's expression, and the bland attitude of the newspaper photograph reappeared. He asked several questions about Bonbright and Wells and was even inclined to joke a bit about the chorus girls.

The interview ended a half-hour later with complete success. Stock mixed an expert Tom Collins and agreed to become a member of the Caravan.

The bicycle ride back to the village didn't seem as punishing as the one coming up. Charlie's thoughts were busy with Daniel Stock. Weird was the word for him all right. It would make a good story to tell Tom and Helen when he got back. Especially since Stock had started to change his mind after he heard Tom was going along. Bonbright, the magnet. The magnet had worked a bit on the hardhearted Helen too. Charlie frowned. He didn't want any extracurricular activity like a love affair diverting his one client's attention.

5

SHORTLY BEFORE ELEVEN Sunday night Tom walked the length of the train to the troupe's special car. Besides a small upright piano and a table across the aisle from it in the center, there was nothing special about the special car. The ornately carved window frames and the dull green of its upholstery indicated it was of an early vintage. At the moment, also, its lighting was too dim, its smell too antiseptic. Tom parked his portfolio on an end seat and hoisted his bag up on the luggage rack.

Nadine Hall, the writer of the nation's most popular war song, was sitting across the aisle, her face pressed to the window, watching the activity outside. Tom stepped over to join her.

"Hello," she said. "I'm glad you're early too. I thought big-city people leaped onto the platform just as the train was pulling out."

"I'm a small-town boy myself," said Tom. "I wouldn't know."

He looked at her young open face with approval. He hadn't been much in contact with the college generation the past few years, but this girl made him doubt the rumors of jam and jive and goldfish swallowing. Nadine had an alert look about her; her short curly hair was vigorously brushed; her blue eyes were serious. "I haven't had a chance to tell you," Tom said, "that I think you've written a great song—a good rousing song with words that mean something. It'll help the spirit of the whole country."

She glowed with his praise. "It's been called the 'Over There' of this war," she said shyly, "but I'm afraid it doesn't deserve to be mentioned in the same breath with Irving Berlin."

"Well, it's a different type of song. It isn't about fighting so much as what we're fighting for. It's simple and sincere and catchy. You're very talented."

She smiled. "The entries were submitted anonymously, you know. The judges told me they almost fainted when they found out a twenty-year-old girl from a small town had written it."

"I don't know why. A song like that couldn't have come out of Tin Pan Alley. That little speech you give when you explain how it was inspired—I think that's one of the best things in our show."

"Your saying that means a lot to me. Just going on this trip means more than I can say. Am I naïve to be so thrilled?"

"Not at all. Where's your home?"

"Merford. It's a little town in New Hampshire. Until I won the song contest I'd never even been to New York before."

"You must know Mount Sokosu. I have a cabin there and I've been going up in the summer for years."

"Why, yes, I do!" She forgot her awe of him in the delight of finding things in common. "I used to go to a camp near Lake Sokosu."

Their conversation was interrupted by the entrance of the Castle Theater girls. The dingy car burst into bloom. Bright-colored coats and little veiled hats and make-up cases and candy boxes covered the seats. The girls called back and forth to each other as they scrambled for places. Wilbur Kahn, the fat bald fellow who played the piano for their routines, followed them in and staked out his claim near the upright.

Tom hadn't yet become used to the chorus. It was still a wonder to him that the conventional features—eyes, nose, and mouth—could get into so many different and equally beautiful arrangements. At the week-end rehearsals he had gotten to know the girls by their hobbies. Now, even as he watched, knitting bags and books and a deck of cards were pulled out, and one girl whom they called Kathleen was spreading monogrammed stationery on the seat beside her and shaking her fountain pen. Charlie had told Tom about her. Her boy friend was a corporal somewhere in the Pacific war zone and, come hell or high water, she wrote to him every day.

Tom looked through the window, searching for Helen. He saw Rupert Wells coming along the platform carrying his own bag. His hat was in his hand, and the bleak electric light beat down on his face. He didn't look the handsome matinee idol tonight. He looked old and unhappy. Two grooves of weariness creased his cheeks. One of the greatest actors of the English-speaking world, and not a soul recognized him. Maybe the autograph hunters hadn't heard about this glamorous departure tonight, although it was hard to believe Charlie hadn't tipped them off.

An approaching flurry on the platform attracted his attention. Speak of the devil! There was a circle of waving pencils and papers and Helen in the center of it dressed in something flamboyant and yellow. Papers were thrust at her, and she was signing them as fast as she could. A little to one side, Charlie was trying to quell the growing clamor and demand. It would serve him right if the crowd trampled him, thought Tom, but then he took it back. The guy was just doing his job. He'd been hired to promote Miss Hathaway, hadn't he?

Miss Hathaway of the Spencer School of Dramatic Expression and three years of summer stock. Miss Hathaway of two second female leads in two plays of modest popularity and one singing role in a musical-comedy flop. Miss Hathaway of the superb face and superior frame and super-sense of publicity. Tom saw the frenzied expressions of the pencil wavers. A lot of sheep—they didn't care who she was.

He jerked the window shade down abruptly and sat back in his seat.

"Do you mind?" he asked Miss Hall.

"Why, no," she said, and then wonderingly, "Why—no."

"Good evening. I'm looking for Mr. Ross." A man was standing in the aisle, smiling at them. Tom noted the curious effect of the light eyes and the raised skin over them where the eyebrows were just beginning to grow again.

"Mr. Ross will be in in a minute," said Tom. "He's running that riot outside. You're Daniel Stock, aren't you? I'm Tom Bonbright. This is Miss Hall."

"How do you do?" Stock's voice was soft, almost womanly. "This is an honor." He put his suitcase on the seat in front of theirs and looked about him. "Quite a change from the sand dunes. I'm beginning to be sorry I couldn't get into town for the rehearsals. By the way, is Mr. Wells here yet?"

"He has the compartment at the front of the car," answered Tom. He saw that Stock bore the marks of his daring feat of a few days ago. The burn along one side of his face and neck looked brown and crusty and sore.

"I understand he's the M.C. of the tour," continued Stock, "and that he's to interview me as part of the show. Naturally, I'd like a little practice."

"It will probably have to wait for morning," volunteered Miss Hall. She was staring with a curious fascination at the man. "He looked very tired when he came in."

Stock offered them his open cigarette case. "I saw him in *Hamlet* once. Is he as moody off stage as he is on?"

"With reason," Tom took a cigarette. "His family's in England. His son flies a bomber with the R.A.F."

"Oh, then—of course."

The train made a few preparatory jerks. As it was starting up

Helen and Charlie appeared breathless in the doorway. Tom tapped Miss Hall's shoulder.

"Big-city folks," he whispered.

Later, when a porter came in to make up the berths, Wilbur and the girls accepted Charlie's invitation to investigate the resources of the club car—all except Kathleen, who was still at work on her letter.

"Hey," called Tom, "quit teething on that pen!"

Kathleen turned, bright with inspiration. "Mr. Bonbright, will you do me a big favor? Will you make a quick sketch of me to send to my boy friend? He'd be thrilled to death."

"Come on over here." Tom untied his portfolio and took out a pad of paper.

"Of course his squadron's voted Lana Turner their favorite pin-up girl, but——"

"They'll have to take a referendum when they see you." He reached over and took the pen from her.

"A what?" asked Kathleen.

She was young and fresh with cream-colored skin and yellow hair. While Tom drew her Helen and Daniel Stock stood behind him and watched with interest.

"Too bad you haven't a paintbox," remarked Stock. "You can't do her justice in black and white."

Tom agreed. "I don't know if I could with a paintbox either. That's more your line, I understand."

Stock had lighted another cigarette. He reached for an ash tray and crushed it out, although he hadn't taken more than a few puffs. "In a way it is," he said. "In my youth I wanted to paint more than anything else. I'm afraid I was destined to be very second-rate. I enjoy it, though."

Tom had been aware of Helen standing a little behind him. Now she said, "Haven't you changed your style, Mr. Bonbright? Don't you usually make your subjects as funny as possible?"

"Caricatures, you mean?" Tom didn't look up. He was busy finishing Kathleen off with an appropriately low neckline. "You have the usual misconception of caricatures. They're not supposed to make people look funny." He handed the sketch to Kathleen.

"It's wonderful! I'm going to take it right in to show the girls!"

"Wait just a minute." Stock took it from her. You want Mr. Bonbright to sign it, don't you? That signature means something, you know."

They all watched as Tom scrawled his name in its familiar place across the lower right-hand corner.

"Now when your soldier gets mad at you," Helen told Kathleen, "he can tear up the picture and sell the autograph. It's worth money."

"That's because I don't glut the market." Tom glanced over his shoulder. "How about you next? I'll teach you a little lesson about caricature."

Helen sat down opposite him and leaned her elbows on the table. "Okay. You can't scare me."

Tom took a good long look at her, though it wasn't necessary. Every detail about her face had been constantly in his mind for the past two days. His pencil flew over the paper.

"You went to art school, of course," said Stock after a moment.

"Sure. A couple of them. Everyone told me quickly I'd never be good, but I didn't care. I was crazy about drawing. I was crazy about eating too. So I got a job on a newspaper and did both."

"That's interesting. Incidentally, I find your cartoons full of propaganda."

"They're meant to be. Some men can string words together and make them work for their ideas. I'm not so talented—but I find a few simple lines can pack an awful wallop. We each do what we can."

"But aren't your few lines likely to oversimplify?" the soft pleasant voice went on from behind Tom, keeping time to the soft scratching of his pencil. "For example, if you picture the enemy as a beast with tail and claws, you are doing less than presenting the truth, are you not?"

"Not at all!" Tom snapped the words out more impatiently than he had meant to do. "The whole basis of cartooning is in the use of symbols. Otherwise, why not be a photographer?"

"I suppose what I mean is that a cartoon is all black and white in more than one sense. There is none of the shading we find in real life."

"You're right. When the shading is removed, so is a good deal of the confusion. I happen to think it is helpful to see black as black and white as white once in a while." An unreasoning anger was rising up in Tom. Every nerve in his back seemed to be aware of the presence of Stock. If the man should lean forward, touching him, he felt his elbow would jerk back viciously to thrust him away. The pleasure he had gotten from drawing Helen was gone. He put down his pencil.

"This is all for now," he told Helen. "I'll finish it some other time. Join me for a nightcap?"

"Yes, thanks." She examined the sketch. "You've got something here."

Stock leaned over to look at it with her. The little lamp on the table lighted his handsome face and smooth skull and the burned tissue along his cheek.

"Excellent. He's got you there. Not the way you actually look, of course, but the essence of your personality. The aliveness, the dash."

Tom put his pad back into the portfolio and tied the strings. It had, he noted, taken Stock no time at all to catch onto what he thought of Helen. He took her arm and started toward the club car.

"See you later, Mr. Stock," she said.

In the club car they sat side by side in front of a little table as far away from the noise of the others as they could get. It seemed there were some soldiers on the train and, in the spirit of the tour, the girls were already building morale. There weren't enough girls to go around, however, and Tom noticed a pink-cheeked young lieutenant glance expectantly at Helen.

As soon as they had ordered he said, "How was the research? How do you like spending Sunday afternoon in the public library?"

Helen turned her gray eyes upon him. The customary facetiousness had gone out of them. "I've spent duller Sunday afternoons than this one. Tracking down murderers doesn't bore me yet."

"I'm morbidly interested in sleuthing methods. What are yours?"

"Plain deduction. From what I've heard about you, you make enemies as easily as you make pictures. There are plenty of people around who wouldn't mind seeing you——"

"Bumped off?"

"I wasn't going to be so brutal. But all right, bumped off. However, that isn't the point. The point is, who would like to see both you and Bill Roberts dead?"

"And you've deducted that that man is Roger Tally?" Tom glared at the lieutenant, who was making motions to attract Helen's attention.

"Yes. And since you've thought of him, too, I'm on the right track. After the reading I did this afternoon I don't see why he wasn't hunting you two boys down long ago."

"He threatened us viciously when the book came out. How'd you like it, by the way?" The lieutenant was lifting his glass to Helen each time he drank, but she hadn't noticed him.

"Devastating. I'd hate to have had you do a job on me."

"We only do—we only did crooks. Small-time crooks—the kind who gyp people out of dimes. We were working up to the big fellows. Listen"—Tom inclined his head irritatedly in the direction of the lieutenant—"there's a soldier pining for a smile. Give him one, for Pete's sake."

Helen leaned over and showed her teeth prettily for the young man in the gold bars. He grinned back at her.

"Tom," she said, "be serious. You do suspect Tally, don't you?"

Tom shrugged. "I don't know. It's farfetched. That book was published a year ago, and his organization collapsed right afterward. We haven't heard a peep out of him since then. I know he's been tied up for months with lawsuits brought by his former followers. It's odd that he should pop up all of a sudden. I'd think it was extremely odd if I didn't also think I saw him on the train coming up from Washington."

"What!" Helen shouted the word at the top of her voice and gaped at Tom. Startled, the lieutenant got to his feet.

Tom pushed Helen back into her seat. "Don't get excited. I'm not sure. I wasn't bright-eyed on Friday. Maybe I should tell the police, but what have I got to tell them when you get right down to it?"

"But your life's in danger! He might be following you right now! You shouldn't have come!"

"What should I do? Stay under a bed in New York? If something is going to happen I'll be ready for it, that's all."

Helen looked at him appraisingly. "As a director I worked with once would say, you act with guts."

Tom stood up. "I'll leave you," he said, "with a young man, who, when the time comes, will act with more."

The lieutenant had reached them by then. He sat down in

Tom's seat. As Tom walked away he heard him say, "You know, you look awfully familiar. . . ."

When Tom got back to the entrance of the troupe's car he stopped short and his hand tightened on the doorknob. He remained on the jangling platform, looking through the window, intent on the scene inside. Stock was sitting at the table where Tom had left his portfolio. He had untied the strings and was flipping through everything in it—the letters, the photographs, the proofs, the clippings—everything.

When the door clicked open Stock was too absorbed to hear it. He didn't look up until Tom had reached his side. Then he smiled.

"Hello. Back so soon? I was looking through your stuff. I hope you don't mind. The portfolio was open, so I didn't suppose there was anything private——"

Tom's eyes widened. This was all said with the most innocent and affable expression. The fellow was incredible.

"You know, there's something fascinating to me about a brother artist's methods," Stock chatted on, "the technique of getting the personal experience onto the paper. Most interesting thing in the world, don't you think?"

"Yes," said Tom slowly. He stared at the brown cardboard portfolio lying before him. Had he tied the strings on it before he left, or hadn't he?

6

THE NEXT NOON Tom sat with the rest of the troupe on the stage of the Herrick Auditorium in Pittsburgh and watched the crowd that filled every seat and overflowed into the side aisles. There are many ways to collect money for wars, he was thinking, as many ways as there are peoples. There is the tight-lipped hypocritical smack from the Duce to the widows who bring him their gold wedding bands; there is the grim shake of the money box and the Nazi gun behind it, and there is this way. These people had come with pockets full of money to buy war bonds, and if they wanted to buy them in this manner with laughter and an eyeful of glamour and a look at the celebrated, that only went to prove they were in an American city and not somewhere in darkest Europe.

As they rose to sing "The Star-Spangled Banner," they looked like no other crowd on earth. Factory and store workers out on their lunch hour, office girls with bright lipstick and shining hair, women holding a child or two by the hand, soldiers on leave, here and there a police officer occupying a seat like anyone else. Their voices rang out the familiar words, not too true on the high notes, but steady and loud.

When they were seated again Mr. Rupert Wells opened the program. A great many of the people present had never seen a Shakespearean production or Mr. Wells before, but they seemed to detect that he spoke their common language as it deserved to be spoken. There was almost a visible swell of pride along the rows that this tongue was their own. Mr. Wells was telling them about the Caravan, and as he described it the eyes of the audience traveled across the stage. First there were the six pretty girls, then the burn-scarred hero, then the college student, then the actress with the alert, mobile face, then the rugged-looking man who was so clever with a pencil. It was a good line-up, and when Mr. Wells was finished they sat back in their seats, but not too far back. There was to be a lot going on, and they didn't want to miss any of it.

To Tom, watching the performers along with them, there was one very false note: Stock, with his cold light eyes, his burns, his restless hands that couldn't hold a cigarette without crushing it out, couldn't hold a piece of paper without folding it into a tiny wad. As Mr. Wells interviewed him and he told the story of the burning tanker in his soft, insinuating voice, Tom thought again about the scene he had witnessed backstage. Maybe the word "scene" was too elaborate. It was over in a few seconds and to any other observer without significance.

What had happened was this: There were dozens of reporters and cameramen backstage when the troupe arrived, and as they pressed around with their questions Tom had happened to glance up just as a man pushed through to grasp Stock's arm, his face alight with welcome and recognition. Stock returned neither of these sentiments. He stepped away, freeing his arm. But the man persisted, talking rapidly, and this time Stock's eyes bulged with anger and he said something in a sharp tone. The man stood frozen for an instant, then with a shrug he was gone.

The point was that if Stock didn't know the man, Tom did. He knew, too, that there was a distinct unpleasantness surrounding his memory of that face, but the memory itself wouldn't come. He watched the rest of the performance through a mist. He knew that there was loud applause after Helen's song and he caught a glimpse of Charlie's fervent face in the wings. The program clicked off smoothly as it had in rehearsal, but it wasn't until Tom heard his own name spoken that he gave up the chase after the elusive idea jogging around in his mind. He promised himself sternly to keep on with it later.

When he walked to the center of the stage the rows and rows of faces staring up at him set going a whirl of reactions. He felt naked and exposed. He wanted something to hide behind. He thought briefly what a good target he must make. If Tally or anyone else wanted to draw a bead on him, here was surely the grand chance. But this phase was soon over. In its place came an immense stimulus. It was intoxicating to know that hundreds of people in the flesh before him were waiting for him to speak. Birth of a demagogue, he thought wryly, and then he thought, It is a good thing I have been pushed out of my office and out of my studio. This is what I needed to understand.

A swingy tune came from Wilbur Kahn's piano, and the tap of a dozen feet behind him as the chorus danced in with the huge pad of white paper. The girls were dressed in red, white, and blue—and little of it—costumes that Charlie had dreamed up with a sure sense of showmanship. Tom took the soft black crayon out of his pocket and stepped up to the pad. He hesitated for a moment, then took off his coat and rolled up his sleeves. There was an appreciative giggle from the audience.

He reached up and made some quick strokes on the paper. The crowd watched him with silent concentration. In a few seconds, when he was drawing the forelock, they shouted: "Hitler!" Rapidly Tom drew a Russian scythe around the Fuehrer's neck, and there was a thunder of clapping. He tore the page off and started another. Pretty soon Tojo appeared too.

Tom turned around to face the audience. He said: "These are our enemies. We all know their names. These are our enemies, but they are not the ones who can beat us. No German or Jap living can beat us. We're Americans, and the only ones who can beat us in this war are other Americans. In the final showdown our worst enemy is within."

I mustn't speak to them just as a crowd, he thought; I must talk to the individuals. His eyes traveled the rows, looking at the separate faces, and then he saw the man again. He was sitting in the very end seat of the second row—and even something about where he sat was disturbing and familiar both at once.

"This is a war," Tom continued, "against the Fascist mind, wherever it is. And unfortunately, Berlin and Rome and Tokyo are not the only places. There are plenty of minds of that type right here with us in America. We must recognize them and be on guard against them."

Tom's crayon was busy on the pad again. He had thought over what he wanted to say, but he had never put it into words before. Now he found the words there just as he wanted them.

"The Fascist mind," he told the audience, "has been bullying decent folks for years. It has pushed us around and blackmailed us and held us up for ransom. It has blocked all the progress we have been trying to make. You can recognize its methods a mile off: lies and violence and threats, to say nothing of a bad smell."

Skillfully he finished the head of an Uncle Sam, the face pained, the mouth wide open to show an aching blackened tooth. He started to draw an open door.

"When we win the war," he went on, "there are some among us who will continue working to see that we lose the peace. If they are successful our military victory will mean nothing, and they know it. It is these native Fascists who are our biggest menace. The focus of infection in a huge healthy nation. We've got to get rid of them." He drew a string from the tooth to the doorknob and turned around abruptly. "We've got to slam that door!"

When the cheers had subsided Tom put the crayon back in his pocket and stepped to the edge of the stage. "For whatever they are worth, I'd like to offer you my suggestions."

His eyes traveled the faces before him again and lingered on the one in the aisle seat of the second row. A recollection swept almost to the surface of his mind and then receded. He talked for two or three minutes more and returned to his own chair on the platform.

Mr. Wells took over again. "If there are any of you who have courage enough to face Mr. Bonbright and his black crayon," he announced, "you may come to the stage and have your caricature drawn by America's greatest cartoonist. Then, if you purchase a war bond, the picture will become your property. We cannot guarantee that you will be pleased with the results of your posing. It is well known that many of Mr. Bonbright's models have not been—but in this case it is your patriotic duty to be brave. I can promise you that Mr. Bonbright is not as deadly as a P-38."

There was a great shout of laughter and dozens of waving hands.

"Since it will be a strain for you who try it to face the caricaturist," continued Mr. Wells, "we want to help you conserve your strength as much as possible. For that reason the young ladies of the chorus will come down into the hall and escort you up here on their strong young arms."

Tom glanced at the man who had accosted Stock. He sat slouched down in his seat, staring moodily up at the stage. The girls started to pair off to bring back the volunteers. Tom stopped Kathleen and Judy as they went past him.

"See that guy?" He pointed unobtrusively. "Go get him and make him come up here. He won't want to—but you kid him into it."

Kathleen looked at the sullen face with misgiving. "But he doesn't seem very——"

"Go on," urged Tom. "I'll lose all my faith in you if you can't do a little thing like that. Go on."

Judy objected. "He's such a sourpuss. Can't you pick somebody else?"

"Bet you dinner tonight I'll have him smiling before the sketch is finished."

The girls put on their most entrancing expressions and with a swish of their short skirts started down the steps into the audience.

He drew the caricatures rapidly with the spare sure lines that were his trade-mark. The sitters were delighted, and each succeeding page from his pad brought a higher price in bonds than the one before. The OPP stunt worked to perfection, as the boss had told Tom it would. The people who had stayed on to watch left their seats and gathered close about the stage. Tom liked having them there and hearing their comments, and to his satisfaction his crayon never made an unsure line. This was a welcome change from the solitude, the chain of cigarettes, the pacing and brooding that usually accompanied his job. He reminded himself to write to the boss at the first opportunity. He wanted to dispell any ideas that he was still sour on the assignment.

He had drawn six or seven faces when Kathleen and Judy appeared with their prize. The other pairs had made two trips into the audience to their one, and as a result they hung onto their scowling captive with determination. The watchers were quick to sense the man's reluctance. They called out encouraging words and jokes, but his expression did not change. When he sat down beside the easel Tom got his first close look at him, and again the faltering recollection almost slipped into its proper niche—but not quite.

The man had a thorny set of features, the main characteristics of which were dark brows that met on the bridge of the nose and a churlish turned-down mouth.

Tom remembered the technique the young lieutenant on the train had used on Helen.

"You look familiar to me, Mr.—uh——" He hesitated, but the man made no attempt to supply a name. "Haven't we met before?"

The man shook his head. "Not that I know of. I don't get to many of these meetings." He crossed his legs and picked at a loose thread on his trousers.

"This is my first one too." Tom began to draw. "Hold your head up a little, please. How'd you like the program?"

"I liked it."

"Ever see a prettier bunch of girls? I expect it'll affect my style—looking at so much beauty. I won't be able to make funny faces any more."

The crowd laughed. The man continued to pick at the thread.

"Will you look up, please?" Tom's eyes met the irate black ones that were raised to his. He reproduced them on the paper.

"And now smile if you please."

The watchers giggled. The man looked startled. He made a grimace and, lightning-like, Tom caught it on the paper. The two girls were shaking their heads vehemently.

Mr. Wells held up the finished picture, but before he had a chance to say anything the man snatched it from him.

"I'll take a hundred-dollar bond," he cried out, and in his voice there was a warning of hysteria. Charlie came to lead him to a bond booth as the crowd cheered politely, and in a moment he had disappeared.

"You cheated," Kathleen hissed at Tom. "Naturally he had to smile when you told him to."

"Okay, dinner's on me," Tom said slowly. "It was worth it."

7

THE CARAVAN was scheduled to make two more appearances in Pittsburgh. One was later that afternoon at a high-school auditorium in the suburbs. The other was in the evening at a hotel ballroom downtown. It turned out that there was to be also a dinner at the hotel, attended by city officials and dignitaries, complete with speeches and unrationed roast chicken. Tom transferred his invitation to Kathleen and Judy from dinner to supper before traintime. But the audience at the evening's performance was too enthusiastic to go home. When Charlie finally herded the performers to the station they had only twenty minutes to spare before their train left for Cleveland.

The station was dismal and almost deserted. Two women sat near the entrance, a baby in a basket between them. Every few minutes the baby gave a high thin wail that echoed through the room with pitiful intensity. Some sailors were asleep on benches, their heads pillowed against duffel bags. The only activity in the place seemed to be at a soda fountain in one corner. Most of the troupe headed for it, and Tom, hooking his arms through those of the two girls, led them in the same direction.

"Come on," he told them. "I promised you supper before traintime."

Mournfully Judy climbed up on a stool and leaned her elbows on the damp marble counter. "You're getting off easy," she said. "I'll have a chocolate soda."

The woman in the spotted apron behind the counter flicked her cloth over the ice-cream freezer.

"No chocolate," she said sternly. "Ain't had no chocolate for two weeks now."

"What are they drinking?" Kathleen gestured toward Stock and Nadine sitting a few seats away from them. "Coffee? Okay, black coffee." She picked up the menu and peered at it. "Coffee, ten cents. Now he's getting off even easier."

Tom said, "Sure coffee won't keep you girls awake? Maybe we'd better skip the whole thing."

The girls groaned, and Kathleen slipped her brown-and-white pumps off her feet to the floor.

"Dynamite couldn't keep me awake," she said. "I'm exhausted. But exhausted."

"What's the matter with you kids? Didn't you ever do four a day in vaudeville?"

"Vaudeville?" said Judy. "What's that?"

"Mr. B.," said Kathleen dreamily, "when we work we belong to a union. We've got rules. Right now we're just on a vacation trip, so they tell us, with a little bond selling on the side."

"That's the story they told me," said Tom. "The vacation angle is strictly exaggerated. Bring some cream, please," he told the waitress.

"Ain't no cream." The waitress glared at him. "This ain't no time of night for me to have cream left."

"Forgive me," said Tom. "I agree with you. This is no time of night for much of anything—not for much of anything ——" His tone changed abruptly and he slipped off his stool. "Excuse me," he told the girls. "I'll be right back."

They looked up in weary surprise as he hurried across the waiting room to a news stand against the opposite wall where a woman was yawningly piling magazines in the case. He took some money out of his pocket, picked up a paper, and hurried back to them.

Judy saw the masthead. "What are you going to do—study up on Cleveland ahead of time?"

"Maybe Miss Hathaway will show him around," suggested Kathleen slyly. "It's her home town."

Tom had been leafing through the newspaper, examining each column carefully. Now he let out a whoop and pointed to a story on the first page of the second section.

" 'City Council to Vote on Redistricting,' " read Kathleen. "So what?"

Tom indicated the by-line. "Jason Woodburn. I've been killing myself trying to remember that reporter's name since this noon."

"What for? And talking about this noon, what was it all about—having us bring that plug-ugly up on the stage?"

"Did you have to work hard on him?"

Judy's tone was indignant. "Work on him? He was so unreceptive he shook my confidence in myself. Who is he?"

"That's what I'm going to find out from Jason Woodburn when we get to Cleveland," said Tom. "If it amounts to anything, I'll tell you then. But not a word to anyone, understand?"

"Why, how thrilling," said Judy. "Secrets."

"Gosh," said Kathleen. "Have I a lot to write to the corporal tonight!"

Tom couldn't sleep. Bill Roberts' thin freckled face and sharp blue eyes kept popping up before him in the dark, and jumbled memories of their long friendship flashed across his mind. There was the one time he had prevailed upon Bill to come up to the cabin at Sokosu for a rest. About one half day of resting was all Bill could stand. He spent the remaining days of the week end cutting up and stacking piles of cordwood. When they left on Monday morning he had sighed with relief.

"It's a pretty enough place," he had said, "but there aren't any people around!"

"That's why I come here," Tom had answered him, "to get away from people."

Bill had looked at him curiously. "You'll never make me believe that."

Tom tossed around in the hot, airless berth for a while longer and then switched on the lamp near his head and looked at his wrist watch. It was 2 A.M. He put on his robe, fumbled in his coat pocket for cigarettes, and quietly stepped out into the aisle. Two dim lamps shone from the ceiling, shedding an eerie light on the swaying green curtains. Tom walked through the car and pushed open the door to the platform. The fresh country air smelled good. He took a deep breath and sat down on a pile of luggage.

A moment later he heard a click as the door was pushed open again and someone joined him on the platform. He couldn't see who it was. There was only the intensified darkness of a body standing a few feet away from him and the glowing tip of a cigarette. He braced himself against the metal wall behind him, nerves tingling as he held his hands in readiness. He felt his pajama collar rise and fall with the quick beating of the pulse in his throat. I'm afraid, he thought; that's why I couldn't sleep. When I've got time to think about it, I'm scared.

"Do you mind if I join you?" said a voice. It was Helen's.

Grateful for the darkness that hid the flush of relief on his face, Tom said, "Not at all. Have a hatbox or a nice soft Gladstone."

She sat down beside him.

"I saw you come out and I couldn't sleep, so I thought I'd come too."

"Coffee in the station?"

"Nothing so simple as that. My mind won't quiet down. Things keep whirling around inside of it."

"What kind of things?" Now that he could trust his hands not to tremble he lighted a cigarette and drew deeply on it to help himself relax.

"Do you think Tally's given up chasing you? If it was Tally?"

"I don't think it was," he lied. "The police have probably got Bill's murderer by now—and I'm back to my old theory. That bang on the head I got was meant for some bad actor."

"Oh." She was silent for a moment. Then she said, "Tom, there's something fishy about Mr. Daniel Stock."

"Helen," he said, "that's a very interesting statement. Now tell me why you think so."

"You're going to be disappointed. I haven't a single reason —just intuition. I know he's a genuine hero and that he did save all those men—he's certainly got those awful burns to prove it —but he seems kind of crazy. Behind that benevolent glaze he puts on, his eyes are—fishy. I don't trust him."

"Has he bothered you? Made any—passes?"

"It's not that. Though I think he consciously exerts what he considers are his charms. Have you noticed how that nice kid, Nadine, has fallen for him? She seems hypnotized. No, it's the way he looks at you, that makes me feel funny."

"At me?" Tom was startled. "I haven't noticed."

"Of course not. It's when you're drawing up on the stage or talking—it's always when you're too busy to notice. It's—menacing."

He tossed his cigarette out of the window. The air current caught it, and the sparks streamed by them like a little rocket. He said, "Aren't you all hopped up because of that gruesome thing we walked into Friday night? Isn't your imagination working overtime, darling?"

"All right. Let's leave it at that for now. By the way, I suppose you're one of those New Yorkers who calls everyone darling?"

"Lord, no. I was born in a town of five thousand souls. If a boy walked down the main drag with a girl he had to get engaged to her. As a result, I'm still very cautious. A hang-over from my childhood."

"That's funny," she said. "I'm cautious, too, as a hang-over from mine. Not for the same reason though. You see, my father always bought me everything I wanted, sometimes before I wanted it. I began to have the feeling people were nice to me because they knew they'd get paid for it." Her voice cut through the darkness, sharp with confession. "I want to do something by myself for a change. I want to find out if I've got some worth besides my father's bank account. I've never known what it is to work."

"Poor little rich girl."

"I was hoping you wouldn't think that. That's not how I meant to sound. It's just that I want to show everybody that I can be an actress without my father buying a play for me. This tour seemed like a good chance. And," she added defensively, "we are selling war bonds."

Tom stood up and leaned against the waist-high partition on the platform. The countryside was one long stretch of blackness, with here and there a truck's headlights on the road or a single illuminated window. He knew that she moved to stand beside him, though he neither saw nor heard her.

"I suppose," he said, "that light at that farm means a calf or a colt is being born—or a horse is sick. On a farm it's always something."

"Something fundamental, you mean? Something that matters more than whether a show is a hit, or whether the leading lady's name is Hathaway, or whether a million people know it. Is that what you mean?"

"Well——" he said.

She stepped on the stub of her cigarette. "Good night," she said. "Thanks for the hospitality." He felt her lips pressed on his suddenly. Then the door clicked behind her.

"Good night, darling," he said.

After she had left Tom smoked one more cigarette and then went back to his berth. His restlessness was gone—he was sleepy and filled with a great contentment. He wanted the morning to come quickly so he could see her and make sure. He closed his eyes, but the sound of her voice kept sweeping over the rim of his consciousness. He fell asleep listening to it.

When he awoke it was still dark and the train was making a series of clanging jerks. They were in some yard, he thought, taking on other cars, and he had been dreaming until the racket disturbed him. He tried to remember the dream because it had been unpleasant. He had felt something pressing on him. It seemed he was out on the platform again, begging for air, and some heavy object had fallen on him and shut it off. As the train started gathering speed he discovered he was taking deep gasps, as if he would never catch his breath.

Then instantly he knew. He lay still, every muscle alert, his eyes boring uselessly at the place where the curtains parted—and waited. When the movement came he was ready. He shifted his body as far as he could toward the window, and his fist shot up blindly with all the strength that was in him. This caused his assailant to lose his balance for a second, and in that second Tom found the face and struck at it. The man grunted and pulled back. Tom's hands slid down over the front of a jacket, and one of them hooked onto a pocket. There was the sound of tearing cloth, and a silhouette showed fleetingly against the dim light outside the curtains. Tom leaped into the aisle. He thought he heard the familiar click of the door, but he wasn't sure if it was at the front or back end of the car.

He got back into the berth and switched on the light. In his hand was a piece of shabby diamond-patterned blue wool the size of a pocket. Close to his own pillow there was another one, larger, the type that is rented from the porter in the coaches for a quarter a night. A man could be quite comfortable, Tom reflected, with his head lying on top of such a pillow and quite dead with his head lying under it.

8

THEY WERE TO STAY at the Hotel Forrest in Cleveland for three days, making a side trip from there to Akron, Ohio. The schedule was jammed with meetings and factory rallies, luncheons and dinners, entertainments for the cadets studying at near-by colleges, and one show to be broadcast over a national hookup. Looking at the list, Tom knew he'd have to snatch whatever free moments he could and make them pay.

When they got into the station the next morning he was dressed and ready to get off the train. He turned his luggage over to Charlie and promised to be at the hotel in plenty of time. Then without waiting to speak to Helen he took a taxi to the Cleveland Police Station.

In about ten minutes he had told his entire story to a Lieutenant Stacy. After all the details were noted down the lieutenant put in a call to Sergeant Boyd in New York, who reported to him that there were no new developments in the Bill Roberts case. The sergeant was given a summary of Tom's recital and a detailed description of Roger Tally. When the conversation was ended the lieutenant turned to Tom.

"If you'd told this story in New York Friday night," he said, fingering the piece of blue wool Tom had brought him, "things might be farther along by now."

"I know." Tom shrugged. "I haven't any excuses. It seemed too fantastic, that's all. Too many coincidences."

"How do you figure that? This man followed you to New York and directly to the theater, where he struck you and thought he killed you. Then he went after Mr. Roberts. When you phoned he knew he had failed in your case. You said you were bringing a lady along, so he couldn't stay. He took care of Roberts, left the apartment, and waited his next chance at you. Evidently last night was the first good opportunity he had to try again. Where's the coincidence, Mr. Bonbright?"

"That I happened to phone Bill Roberts while his murderer was with him, for instance."

"You phoned shortly after eight o'clock, didn't you? What other time would a man who works all day and takes his meals out be at home? What other time would either you or the man who killed him find him at home?" The lieutenant spoke in a monotone, reasonably, as if he were repeating a long-memorized piece. "In our work, Mr. Bonbright, we do not make the mistake of discounting too much for coincidence. At second glance no two things turn out simply to have happened. There are usually causes and good explanations for the timing."

Tom stood up and walked to the window. He was frowning.

"The timing is what puzzles me. How come he decided to start out after us after a whole year has gone by? Why just at this moment?"

"There's an answer to that one too." The lieutenant consulted his notes. "Maybe I'll have it for you today yet."

"I can't swear it was Tally last night, you know. That piece of cloth doesn't prove anything yet, and I didn't see his face."

"I understand. In the meantime I think you should have some protection. I'm going to assign a couple men to keep their eyes on you."

"You mean a bodyguard? That's impossible. How will I explain it?"

"I'll ask them to be as discreet as possible, but I can't let you go around alone in the city and in the crowds you're going to meet. This Tally or whoever it is has been fairly cautious about hiding his tracks up till now. As things get harder for him he may not be. He may jump at any opportunity to get you and not give a damn about himself." Tom stepped away from the window. "Am I alarming you?"

"There's no sense in telling you I'm comfortable about it."

"There's no sense in not taking precautions either. You're too valuable a man. I know. I've watched your cartoons for years." The lieutenant stood up and held out his hand. "It's been an honor to meet you, Mr. Bonbright."

The two men shook hands and walked through the corridor into the waiting room. Sunshine made big square patches on the floor, and the uniforms of two policemen reading the bulletin board looked protective and reassuring.

"I'll keep in touch with you," said the lieutenant. Tom walked down the station steps. There was a taxi waiting in front. It took all his will power not to make a dash for it.

He inquired at the desk for his room number and went directly up. Evidently the others had rooms near by, but before he started reconnoitering he had two things to do. His familiar suitcase and portfolio, his topcoat thrown across a chair, the conventional hotel furniture, and the morning noise of a vacuum sweeper in the next room blotted out both the unreal horror of the incident of the night before and the too-real session he had just had with the police. Everything seemed normal again, and with the return of normality his appetite rose in full force.

He picked up the telephone and ordered breakfast, as much of everything as it was legal for the kitchen to send up to him. Then he dialed the number of the Cleveland *Inquirer*. Jason Woodburn was out, he was told, out on a story. When Tom hung up the phone rang immediately. It was Charlie.

"Everything all right, Tom?"

"Okay, thanks. What's Helen's room number?"

"She's not staying at the hotel. She's out at her folks' house—out in a place called Shaker Heights. As a matter of fact, I'm out here with her right now."

"Good. Call her, will you, old man? I want to talk to her."

Helen's voice came over the phone right away. It hadn't any of the intimate quality Tom remembered from the night before. In fact, it sounded as if Shaker Heights must be a very distant suburb.

"Good morning."

"Good morning to you."

There was an ungraceful silence.

"Uh—how did you sleep?"

"Very well. And you?"

"Fine."

"Are you always such an early riser? Charlie says you jumped off the train before it was properly stopped."

"Oh." Tom was beginning to understand that her voice would have sounded that way even if she were in the next room.

"Or was it I you were running away from? I assure you there was no danger. I always have my hair up in the morning."

"Darling, I wouldn't have left without seeing you, but I had an important errand. Listen, I'm coming out to your house to talk to you. I'll get a taxi right away."

"You'd better not. There are a lot of reporters and photographers and people here. I'm going to be very busy."

"So that's starting again! Well, watch the birdie, and don't put your autograph on any blank checks."

What the deuce, he thought, when he hung up. It's her home town. Why shouldn't they make a fuss over her? I'm getting to be an awful mean son of a gun.

The house, a square red brick colonial with white pillars, looked big enough to be called home by two dozen uncrowded people. There was an air of solid prosperity about it; the wide lawn and the shrubbery were sleek, and the knocker shone. Several cars were drawn up on the crescent-shaped drive leading to the entrance.

Tom cut across to a large open veranda along one side of the house and looked through the french doors at the reporters milling about in the living room. Helen was nowhere in sight, but Charlie was a good stand-in for her. He did everything but pose for her pictures. Tom swung his legs up on a bamboo chaise longue, stretched out, and waited. In a few minutes a slender gray-haired man came out with a newspaper folded under his arm. It was apparent that Helen had inherited her fine bones from him.

"Good morning," he said. "Do you suppose you gentlemen will be through with our house soon?" His tone was one of controlled exasperation. "Mrs. Hathaway and I haven't had any privacy since our daughter walked in this morning. It's very disturbing."

"Having a celebrity in the family usually is."

The older man perched on a blue-and-white hassock and glanced toward the living room.

"I don't know where that girl gets her affection for publicity," he confided. "I've always believed in keeping to oneself, keeping out of the spotlight."

"That kind of deportment is sure death to an acting career."

"Acting career!" Mr. Hathaway snorted. "I'm not worried. She'll change her mind before long. She always has."

Tom was curious. "Why should it worry you? Acting is considered respectable these days, isn't it?"

"But she doesn't need a career! It's just a whim. Besides, it's nonsense—running around the country giving shows to sell war bonds. Trouble is, people are getting used to having everything too prettied up for them."

Tom's eyes darted over Mr. Hathaway's pale, closely shaven face. It looked as brittle as an eggshell and as carefully handled.

"It isn't a matter of sugar coating," Tom said; "it's a matter of giving people a certain feeling when they buy a bond that we're all in this war together and that each of us has a stake in what comes out of it. When your daughter gets a man to buy a twenty-five-cent stamp with the right emotion inside him, she's——"

The conversation indoors became suddenly intensified, and Tom interrupted himself. What am I preaching to him for? he thought. He leaned over in time to see Helen coming into the room in a red-and-white-striped dress, a huge red flower on her shoulder.

"We'll finish the interviews in here and take the pictures in the garden," Charlie was announcing.

Tom stood up, and two men who had been sitting on the porch steps stood up with him.

"For Pete's sake," murmured Mr. Hathaway, "is every reporter in town out here?"

Tom shook his head. "Those aren't reporters, sir. Just my bodyguards."

He would have given a great deal to look back at Papa's face as he walked into the other room, but after all, the more important sight was ahead. He had caught a glimpse of Jason Woodburn in the crush around Helen.

9

WOODBURN SHOUTED, "Mr. Bonbright! It's Tom Bonbright! How are you?" He pumped Tom's hand with loud enthusiasm.

There was a sudden flow of humanity away from Helen as the newsmen pressed about Tom and the photographers jumped for the best place to focus on him. Before he was entirely engulfed Tom tried to signal to Helen that he was helpless, but she gave him a cold stare and tramped out, Charlie trotting after her.

After several minutes of questions and answers Tom finally retreated into another room and dragged Woodburn with him.

"There's something very important I've got to ask you," Tom told him. "Give me a piece of paper quick."

"Sure." Woodburn brought out a tattered envelope. "It's sure good to see you again, Mr. Bonbright. Must be four years, isn't it?"

"On the nose. You have a good memory, thank God. This paper's too small. Haven't you anything else?"

Woodburn went through his pockets without success. "I'll go in and ask for some."

"No." Tom stopped him. "Don't go back in there. I don't want to be interrupted again. Let's look around."

A search of the room they were in, a breakfast room, yielded nothing. Tom pushed at a swinging door, and they went through into the kitchen. In the center of it a table with a white porcelain top shone bare and inviting. Tom got out his crayon and began to draw. In a few seconds the black wax produced a face that glared up at them from the table top. It was the face of the unwilling model the girls had corralled for him at the Herrick Auditorium.

"Know him?"

Woodburn scowled at the connecting brows and ill-humored turned-down mouth.

"I've seen him."

"Do you remember where?"

All at once Woodburn brought his fist down square and hard on the drawing's nose.

"Philip Wald! The dirty little Fascist skunk!" he yelled.

The face of one of Lieutenant Stacy's men peered around the door.

"Everything all right, Mr. Bonbright?"

"You bet," said Tom.

They got into Woodburn's car and drove back downtown to the Inquirer Building. Woodburn shuffled impatiently while the elevator took them up to the third floor. When they got into the newspaper library it was only a minute before he found what he wanted. He pulled a dusty brown envelope out of a filing cabinet and emptied its contents onto a table.

"Here it is," he said grimly, holding up a glossy photograph.

As an illustration of various human emotions the photograph was interesting enough. It was a flashlight picture snapped at some kind of meeting. Two or three rows of the audience showed in the background. In the foreground a man crouched in his seat, shielding his head with his arms. A dark trickle could be seen running down his chin. Behind him stood the man Tom had just drawn on the kitchen table, an expression of vicious wrath on his face, his upraised hand holding a short heavy club. A man in an adjoining seat had half risen, popeyed and openmouthed. Further along the row there was a big blur where someone had moved as the shutter clicked.

"Me," said Tom, putting his finger on the blur.

Woodburn looked down at the picture with narrowed eyes. "I had to have six stitches taken in my scalp," he said, "and my face gave my mother the jitters for a month."

The two men bent over the news clippings that had been in the envelope with the picture. Tom picked up one of them. The headlines read:

CLEVELAND REPORTER SLUGGED
MADISON SQUARE BUNDIST RALLY
ENDS IN NEAR RIOT

POLICE ESCORT DOROTHY THOMPSON FROM
MEETING AS HECKLERS ARE BEATEN

"Tell me what's up, Mr. Bonbright," begged Woodburn. "Have you run into Wald? Is he up to something? What's it all about? Wouldn't I like to get my hands on him once!" The prospect of revenge for his scarred skull lighted Woodburn's eyes.

"I'm afraid you can't do that unless you go to Pittsburgh," Tom said. "Pittsburgh is where I saw him. As a matter of fact, I don't know what it is all about. If you have time to walk back to the hotel with me I'd like to get your slant."

"Sure thing." Woodburn picked up his hat and started for the door. "Come on upstairs while I tap out this story about Cleveland's own Helen Hathaway, return of the native, et cetera—then I'll go with you."

In the elevator Woodburn said, "By the way, how is the glamour girl to work with?"

"Who?" asked Tom. "Helen? She's okay. You sound as if——"

"Yeah. I don't go for this stuff she's putting on. A press agent to deal with the reporters! You'd think she was important."

"It looked like it," commented Tom as they walked down the hall. "You fellows were out there in full force."

"It's her old man who's important. He retired a couple of years ago so's he'd have time to spend his money. He always bought Helen everything. Now I suppose he's got a deal on for an acre of Broadway."

They walked into the city room, and Woodburn sat down before a typewriter. The keys clicked rapidly under his fingers. He said:

"What is this myth about Miss Hathaway's talent?"

"I wouldn't call it that," objected Tom. "She hasn't been cast correctly yet. If she ever gets the right part I think she'll take."

"She ought to know something about acting," admitted Woodburn, tapping steadily. "She's acted like a spoiled brat all her life."

"What was she like as a youngster?"

"Awful. Skinny as a pole and gawky. It would have been a pleasure to wring her neck." Woodburn rocked his chair back on two legs and reminisced. "When she got older she went away to be finished, and when she came back she was a debutante and a prom trotter, and when she got tired of that she wanted to work on a newspaper, and when she got tired of that she wanted to be an actress, and now she's donating her assorted talents to Uncle Sam. Nuts!" He brought his chair down to the floor with a bang.

"Listen," said Tom, "give her a chance. This trip is going to do something for her. She'll be changed when it's over. After all, she's had a lot of strikes against her. I should say Papa is a big one."

Woodburn eyed him wryly and pulled his sheet from the typewriter roll. "She's changed already," he said. "She's beautiful now."

As they walked over to the hotel Tom told Woodburn about the incident in Pittsburgh, about Wald's effusive greeting to

Stock and Stock's freeze-up, and how the girls had inveigled Wald to the platform to sit for his caricature.

Woodburn nodded. His face still bore an expectant expression.

"I'm afraid," concluded Tom, "that's all. I warned you it wasn't much of a story, but it—it kept me awake last night. I myself suggested that Stock be brought along because of the superman rescue he pulled out there on the Cape, but I keep wondering if a pal of Philip Wald's ought to be along on a morale-building tour. Probably not so long ago he was busy tearing down morale. Besides, we're going to be seeing the insides of a lot of plants and other places. I don't know——" He ran his hand through his hair, rumpling it as he searched for words to communicate this feeling about Stock that wasn't yet quite a feeling. In a woman they called it intuition. Helen had intuition.

Woodburn asked, "What more do you know about the gentleman?"

"Not much," Tom admitted. "He's talkative enough, but never about himself—usually he asks all the questions. The only definite thing I've picked up is that he originated in Boston and spent a couple of years at Harvard. It's hard to tell when—his age is vaguely forty. How could we find out more about him in an unobtrusive way?"

"It can be done. Where does the Caravan go from here?"

"Detroit day after tomorrow. Then Chicago for three days."

"Let me know your hotel in Chicago. I'll have something for you by then. In the meantime I think I'll come to this luncheon today. I want to get a look at him."

They turned the corner onto Euclid Avenue and were caught up in crowds lining the sidewalk. The strains of a brass band playing a Sousa march drifted to them, and over the shoulders of the people in front they could see bangle-covered ladies riding on the heads of elephants.

"Circus parade," explained Woodburn. "Ringling Brothers—here for a week. I suppose we won't be able to cross the street for a few minutes."

They had come to a stop in front of the entrance to a bar. "Let's duck in here," suggested Tom. He turned abruptly and beckoned to two men behind them. "Come on, boys, I'll buy you a drink."

They went into the shadowy nearly empty bar and sat down at a table.

"Who are they?" demanded Woodburn, staring at the two strangers who had joined them so suddenly.

Tom shrugged. "I don't know their names. They're friends of Lieutenant Stacy's of the Cleveland Police Department." He crooked his finger at the waiter. "What'll you have?"

"Straight scotch," murmured Woodburn. "I need it. And at the risk of repeating myself, may I ask what it's all about? What's up, anyway?"

"The only risk you run is not getting an answer," said Tom. "Just leave it that this is a sample of your home city's hospitality." A brief memory of those moments with Helen on the train platform came back to him. "Thanks for your hospitality," she had said. He turned to the two plain-clothes men.

"I don't want to give you fellows too energetic a time, but would you mind going to a circus tomorrow afternoon? I'd like to take a lady."

His bodyguards greeted this proposal with pleasure, and the conversation turned to the attractions of the big top. Only Woodburn drank silently. He didn't say a word until the check had been paid and they were on their way again; then he took Tom's arm.

"By the way, Mr. Bonbright, there will be a slight charge for my services in this Stock matter in the form of your telling me why you are being protected by the C.P.D."

"I can't do that now," answered Tom, "without violating my orders. I promise you that if there turns out to be a story in it I'll let you know first."

"In the meantime," said Woodburn grimly, "I'm going to do my damnedest to find out. You apparently have two stories, Mr. Bonbright, and as an old newspaperman you ought to know which one is news." He looked at Stacy's men following behind them. "That is the one you have not told me."

By the time Tom and Woodburn arrived at the ballroom of the Hotel Forrest the five hundred luncheon guests were already busy with creamed chicken in patty shells. Tom tried to slide quietly into his own place at the speakers' table, but two city fathers flanking him welcomed him profusely, and a couple of flashlight bulbs went off. Remembering the awkward moment the cameramen had given him at her house an hour before, Tom glanced quickly at Helen. He was presented with a cleanly chiseled and motionless profile.

Later, before the vanilla sherbet, he wrote her a note:

I see by Charlie's schedule that we are given a layoff tomorrow afternoon from two to six. There is a circus in town. Will you go with me? Otherwise I shall have to spend those hours working—and all work and no play makes etc. T. B.

After the coffee the answer came back:

You don't *really* believe anything could make you a dull boy, do you? Well, I do. The answer is no. Thanks. H. H.

It was much much later, after all the speeches and all the performances, that Tom finally came face to face with her.

"Now look here——" he began.

"It's no use," she cut him off. "I've already told Mr. Stock I'll go with him." Her smile was rather smug, he thought, but there was just a hint of anxiety in her voice.

10

THE WAR seemed to have receded very far beyond the billowing white circus tents and their strings of colored banners flying in the breeze. Outwardly it might have been the same circus Helen had seen when she was ten or fourteen. The odors were the age-old circus odors: popcorn, peanuts, and canvas, and the pungent smell of the animal cages. The long rows of posters depicting the fat lady, the Siamese twins, the tattooed man, bigger and more startling than life, were strung up as usual, and vendors wove through the crowds offering the familiar puffs of pink cotton candy on sticks and miniature pony whips, sombreros and chameleons. Even the sun beating down on their heads and the dust rising up to powder their shoes were the same as they had always been on circus day.

Helen could trace exactly how she began to feel the difference. First there was the incident in the ticket line. A wizened old man in the red-and-green tunic of the circus attendants had come out and asked the line to move far over to the right so the gate would not be blocked. As they did it Stock remarked loudly, "Put a little beggar into a uniform and he has to show his authority." Some people standing near them smiled sheepishly and some others merely looked around. Helen wondered if they felt as she did that the carnival spirit had been broken. Harshly they had been reminded that the world was not like the circus, all comradely fun and frolic.

Later as they joined the throngs on the midway there was the moment when she was jostled against her companion by a sticky joy-blinded child and she felt the cool white linen of his jacket against her bare arm and saw his hand reach out to cuff the boy. His voice was rather amused when he said, "This is a great place for the childlike, isn't it?" and the boy disappeared in the crowd before she could tell if the hand had landed too roughly.

There was no uncertainty, however, about what happened a few minutes later. They had come to a stop in front of a concession booth that displayed hideous satin cushions, hand-painted with designs and verses.

"Two throws for a quarter," bawled the barker. "Knock out Tojo! Sock Schickelgruber! An almighty privilege, friends, and all for one twenty-five-cent piece!"

In front of the shelves of prizes were small wooden figures of these two. The barker held forth a handful of rubber balls. His eyes fell on Stock.

"Take a chance, sir," he whined. "Win the lady a beeyoutiful prize for her boodower."

Helen pointed to a cushion far up on the shelf. "That's the one I want," she said. She tried to make her voice sound as gay as any girl's at a circus. She felt that if she could only pretend hard enough to be having a good time the depression over her might lift. The cushion she pointed to was blue with a garland of red roses painted on it. Beneath the roses, in fancy script, were the words:

Smile, gentle maid, my day is bright.
Frown on me, my day is night.
Let roses tell my love to thee
Ere I plead my suit on bended knee.
HIRAM HAVERSHAM, 1887

Stock put down a quarter and took two balls. He aimed with great deliberateness and hit each figure squarely, laying it flat.

"Excellent, sir! Excellent!" the barker shouted. "Take a chance, folks. Do as this gentleman has done. Knock down the dictators."

Stock said, "Give the young lady the blue cushion she wants."

"I'm sorry, sir." The barker shook his head. "That's a grand prize. You must have a dollar's worth of perfect scores to win a grand prize."

Helen laughed. "Okay," she said. "My boudoir will have to get along without that masterpiece." She started to walk on.

"One moment." Stock spat out the command. He laid a bill on the counter. "Give me a dollar's worth."

The barker uncovered his square yellow teeth with alacrity. He counted out the balls. "Remember," he cautioned, "you must get eight perfect hits in succession."

Helen stared. "Why, that thing isn't worth a dollar," she protested, "let alone so much effort. Come now, Mr. Stock, we have a lot to see this afternoon."

His expression when he turned to her made her swallow the rest of her argument. His lips were tight. She had a sudden unexplained fear that he would strike her if she said any more.

"You said you wanted that cushion, did you not?" he inquired coldly.

"Well, yes. But I was only joking. Really, I——" Helen stammered and looked around. What had a moment before been a crowd of friendly spectators looked now like a circle of grinning masks. Fantastically as if on a distant sound track a hand organ tinkled a tune. But the only real sound in the world seemed to be the swish of the ball through the air and the plop of the wooden figures as over and over Stock laid them flat. Then he missed and a large "Oh" went up from the watchers. The barker clicked his tongue sympathetically. Stock put another bill on the counter.

"Give me eight more," he said. His skin looked white around the nostrils. The aim, the swish, and the plop began over again. Seven times he knocked down the targets, but the eighth ball went wide. A woman giggled. Someone called, "Too bad!" Stock reached into his pocket for his wallet as the barker hopped around to pick up the balls.

O God, thought Helen, he's insane. She remembered her words to Tom on the train platform: "There's something fishy about Mr. Daniel Stock," and Tom had told her it was her imagination! She looked at the perspiration on Stock's face and the discolored gash of the burn along his cheek. He'll never stop, she thought wildly, watching him line up the balls again. He'll never stop and I'll never get out of here. She reeled and leaned against the booth for support as he drew back his arm and began to throw. She fastened her eyes to every ball he picked up and willed it to its mark. Each wooden figure in its turn banged down and sprang up. This time he was successful. There was some applause from the crowd. Stock thrust the pillow into Helen's arms, and the scent of cheap rayon and paint rose up to her as he pulled her out into the midway again.

He swung along jauntily and his smile was almost boyish as he searched her face.

"You said you wanted it," he reminded her, all his bland good humor returning.

"Yes," said Helen. "Yes, thank you. I'm sorry it was so much trouble."

"No trouble." Stock guided her toward the main tent. "I couldn't give up once I'd started, obviously. Besides, I wanted to make that scum live up to his bargain."

Helen looked down at the pathetic pillow with its sentimental jingle and shivered. It was hardly a bargain at three dollars.

She tried to watch the rest of the circus, but nothing seemed to be in focus save the outlines and movements of the man beside her. The playing of the band was only a dim background sound for the sharp crackle of the paper program as he crumpled it between his fingers. If he coughed the rasp was like a gun's report in her ears. He leaned back in his chair, his shoulder pressing hers, and she sat rigid, afraid to move away.

When the aerial acrobatic acts came on he showed the first sign of excitement. The intricate balancing stunts on the wires strung a hundred feet above them fascinated him. Finally the pounding of the kettledrums and the blue-white gleam of spotlights heralded the most daring feat of all. A man was setting forth across the wire, balancing in his upraised hands a long horizontal pole. On the pole stood two men, holding aloft still a third. As the bottom man inched slowly along Helen felt her stomach whirl with anxiety and she looked away.

Stock's fingers gripped her arm and he shook her. "Watch him! Watch him!" he insisted. "You mustn't miss this!" His upturned eyes were shining with elation.

"It frightens me," gasped Helen. "Why does he do it? No matter what he gets paid, it isn't enough for doing that! I don't see why——" She stared hypnotically at the tiny shoe soles and the foreshortened figure of the man on the wire. He was almost a quarter of the way across by now.

"It's not the money," whispered Stock. "It's the power. Don't you understand? Don't you see? The other three count for nothing in his hands. At every performance it is he who makes the decision. Shall they live or shall they die?"

The man with his precarious burden was halfway across the wire by now. The drums beat on in a rising crescendo.

"I know that power. I've had it. When those sailors were dying there in the water and the flames I made the decision to bring them out." The voice hissed in Helen's ear. "I chose the ones I wanted to live and the ones I wanted to die. Did you know that?"

Helen thought the pounding drums would burst her ears as the man above them stretched out one foot and touched the opposite platform. The three that made up the pyramid leaped down beside him and they took their bows together. She wrenched herself out of her seat and stood up. The activity in the sawdust rings below swam before her eyes.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I don't feel well. I'll have to leave."

Stock was all solicitation as he helped her outdoors. She refused his offer to see her home.

"Can I drop you at the hotel?" she asked.

"No, thanks." His light eyes glinted with some inner stimulation. "I think I'll walk."

With a sigh Tom stood up from his drawing board and answered the light rapping on his door. When he saw it was Helen he opened it wider and looked at his watch.

"Short circus," he said.

She walked in and tossed the blue cushion on his dresser.

"What's that?"

"A souvenir for you. Mr. Stock won it."

Tom picked up the lump of satin. He read the verse out loud.

"By Hiram Haversham, 1887. Old-fashioned fellow, wasn't he?"

"Don't make fun of that thing," warned Helen. "Mr. Stock had to throw three dollars' worth of rubber balls at Tojo and Hitler to win it."

"Well, I'm glad to hear his instincts are all right. I was beginning to doubt them."

"Were you—since when?" Helen's voice was heavy with sarcasm. She saw the papers strewn on the floor and the board set up near the window.

"If you're busy I'll go home."

"No, I've done enough." He tapped a thick envelope already stamped and addressed. "Besides, I want to talk to you. How did you enjoy your afternoon with our hero?"

"Oh, fine. Fine. He saw to it that I didn't miss a thing. Peanuts and pink lemonade and good center seats and"—her eyes pricked suddenly with the rush of memory—"I was so scared."

Tom pushed her down into a chair. He went to the bureau and fixed her a drink out of the bottles and bucket of ice standing on it. Then he sat down on the bed and faced her.

"Start at the beginning."

When she had told him about the afternoon she said, "Now don't try to convince me that it's my imagination this time."

"No." Tom stared into his glass. "No. I won't. I shouldn't have said that the other night either. You were right. There is something peculiar about that gent. Charlie's tale about his trip to the Cape made that clear." He glanced up at her from beneath quizzical brows. "Since your engagement with him this afternoon has turned out to be in the nature of research, perhaps you'd like to hear about mine?"

"Yes. But before you begin you might as well know that my engagement this afternoon was not in the nature of research but of revenge."

"I see." Then she cared enough to have been really hurt about his leaving the train the morning before without speaking to her, he thought. Somewhere in the back of his mind a little diagram for gladness took shape. Later he would bring it out into the light and examine it. He began to tell her about Stock's invasion of his portfolio the first evening of their trip and about the man Philip Wald in Pittsburgh and Woodburn, the reporter.

When he had finished he shrugged. "It builds up to a house of cards, that's all. He shows an exaggerated interest in me and my belongings, but that could be due to professional curiosity, as he said when I caught him at it. A minor but fanatic brown shirt greets him and is snubbed. Does that mean he has given up former Bundist associations or that he wishes to hide them? He tells you he made the rescues for which I recommended we honor him"—Tom laughed shortly—"not from humane motives but from the desire to play God. Does that make him less a hero?"

Helen said gravely, "I wish I could describe to you how he acted throwing those balls. He was insane about it. He was so determined——"

"He's a psychopath. He's farther from the norm than most of us. But what else? I have a feeling that there's something more. Some direction to all his deviousness. Maybe the information Woodburn gets from Boston will help. In the meantime I shall remain curious."

She looked at him, her gray eyes troubled. "Are you sure nothing more has happened to prove I was good at playing detective last Sunday?"

"No. Why?"

"You must have been joking with Father."

"Did he say anything?"

"Nothing complimentary. He didn't care for the idea of your having a bodyguard or the handwork you left in the kitchen. I don't believe you gained an admirer."

"He's in good company. I regret it, though, because if I should happen to ask him for his daughter's hand——"

"He'd turn you down flat," she finished for him. She went over to the mirror and fixed her hair and drew new red lips on her mouth.

"I've got to hurry," she said. "We're supposed to be at the university to eat with the cadets at six." She walked to the door. "Nobody consults fathers any more," she said just before she left. "That stuff went out with Hiram Haversham in 1887."

It was a quarter to six and Tom was standing before the mirror tying his tie when Stock walked in. He had knocked and turned the knob simultaneously, a mannerism Tom found extremely annoying. He reminded himself to keep the door chain on after this. Part of his annoyance may have come, too, at the sight of Stock's tall graceful figure in its immaculate white suit, the blue shirt collar pinned so precisely beneath the knot of the darker blue tie. Regardless of the fact that his own suit was newly pressed, Tom felt rumpled by comparison. He yanked at his tie and left the ends hanging unevenly on purpose—as if to assert his indifference to his well-groomed visitor.

"Hello. I thought I'd look in to see if you were ready." The voice was characteristically soft and cheerful. The scent about him characteristically shaving lotion. He pulled out the straight chair beside the desk and swung his leg over it as if it were a hobbyhorse, its back serving as a rest for his arms. Tom found something intolerably intimate in the way he made himself at ease—as if they were two pals in a fraternity house.

The phone rang. "I'll be ready in a minute," Tom said to Stock in as controlled a tone as he could manage. He put the receiver to his ear.

"Mr. Bonbright? Lieutenant Stacy speaking."

"Yes?"

"We've been checking on Tally all day. I have a little information for you."

"Good."

"According to the report we just received, Tally's been so washed up and discredited with civil litigation started as a result of your book that the prosecutors have apparently felt it wasn't worth the effort to prosecute him. From the court records we know he was last in court a few weeks ago when he was enjoined from any further activities in non-profit organizations."

Tom laughed. "Non-profit in quotes, I judge."

"Definitely. But there's something else. Roger Tally made a Pullman reservation on a train to Washington last Thursday night. You left Washington Friday noon. Seems likely it was Tally you saw on that train and he was following you, doesn't it? The way I figure it, this whole year of lawsuits gave him time and reason to brood on revenge. Then the first chance he got after the courts were through with him, he lighted out after you."

"It jibes all right, Lieutenant." The last word slipped out by accident. Tom glanced at Stock, who was bending over the desk, apparently unheeding.

"Well, that's all. Just wanted to keep you informed. I'll be phoning you again before you leave town."

Tom hung up. When he turned around again Stock was holding the envelope of drawings in his hands.

" 'McLeod Features, Inc., Rockefeller Center, New York City,' " he read aloud. "I see you've had a productive afternoon, Bonbright."

Anger poured hotly over Tom's face. He slammed the closet door. Be careful, he warned himself, or the whole card house will topple. When he answered his tone was controlled. "I managed to finish up some roughs I had along," he said. "I'm trying to keep as far ahead as possible."

"Looks like you're getting set for a real vacation up at your Mount Whatever-it-is." Stock spoke with an air of genial envy. "If you finish two weeks of cartoons ahead of time you won't have to lift a pen up there, eh?"

"Not exactly." Tom wondered if the slammed door had been too marked before. "I'm going to work up at Sokosu. There's the time element, you know. Two-week-old cartoons don't mean anything." He decided to cover up for the door with a rush of polite small talk. "How was your afternoon? How is the wartime version of the circus?"

"Excellent. All the top performers are still there. I found it very exciting—but I'm afraid the heat and thrills were too much for Miss Hathaway. She felt ill and we left early. She assured me she'd go directly home and lie down."

"Sorry to hear that," murmured Tom. "She probably needed a rest." He was standing at the dresser, picking up cigarettes, keys, papers, and pencil stubs and replacing them in the pockets of his suit. As he reached for the odds and ends of change his hand struck the blue cushion, and the nerve ends of his fingers communicated their message instantly and painfully, as if it had been a hot iron. He raised his head until his eyes were on a level with Stock's in the mirrored reflection. There was no expression in the light blue gaze that met his own, but the long symmetrical lips were stretched with merriment.

11

THE SCHEDULE READ: "Thursday noon, McAllister Steel Mill, Detroit."

As they got into the cars that had been sent for them from the McAllister Mill, Nadine looked around quickly and asked:

"Where's Mr. Stock?"

"He'll be down in a minute," Charlie told her. "He's waiting for a phone call."

"Oh." In a glance she summed up the occupants of the automobile she was about to enter and stepped back onto the sidewalk. "Maybe Mr. Stock and I had better get into the other car," she said lightly. "Then we'll be evenly divided."

"Sure," agreed Charlie. There was nothing subtle, he thought, about this girl. No cover-up. The heart was on the sleeve plain as a sergeant's stripes. Himself, he preferred the suspense of a chase—such as Helen might lead a fellow, for example. He looked at her sitting in the back seat next to Tom. She wore a green linen dress with pearl buttons down the front and pearls in her ears. Cool as a cucumber, he thought unoriginally. In the short time he had been press-agenting her he had found that underneath she could be as crisp and icy as that vegetable too. Charlie was thankful for that. He didn't want any love affairs messing up his plans for her career. His eyes shifted to Tom, who had given some cause to worry the first few days, but the thing seemed to have petered out. Right now Tom had almost turned his back on Helen and was reading a letter with Kathleen, who sat on the other side of him. It was a letter from her corporal, and they were laughing over the Australian slang he had put into it.

One of the drivers tapped Charlie's shoulder. "I think we'd better be leaving, Mr. Ross. It's almost a whole hour's drive to the plant."

Charlie looked at his watch. It was after eleven. He ran up the steps to the lobby and picked up the house phone.

"Ring 912," he told the operator.

The buzz was cut short as Stock, who had evidently been right beside the phone, picked up the receiver.

"Hello," said Charlie. "Has your call come through yet, Mr. Stock? We're waiting."

"No. I thought this was it."

"I'm afraid we can't wait any longer. We're supposed to be at the plant by twelve."

"Perhaps you had better go ahead then. I'm sure my friend will call any minute and I'll grab a taxi and follow you out."

"Well—okay. But I don't like to upset the schedule out there. We told them noon and——"

"This call is extremely important to me." The voice was polite but insistent. "I promise you I'll be there by the time you are."

"Okay then. See you later."

Charlie went out and broke the sad news to Nadine. "Too bad," he announced; "you'll have to ride with me. Mr. Stock's still waiting for his call. He says he'll come out in a cab."

At five to twelve Stock had not yet arrived, but Mr. Seely, the plant manager, assured Charlie that the men who could be released from their work for the rally could go out twenty minutes or a half-hour later just as easily.

Tom was standing by the office window looking across the graveled yard. "Just how long is that building over there?" he asked, "the one with the three smokestacks?"

"More than a mile long," answered Mr. Seely triumphantly. "That's the Rollin' Mill—mighty interestin'. I don't know why you shouldn't take a look at it if you want to." Mr. Seely reached for his cap on the hook behind the desk. " 'Tisn't violatin' anythin'. Once you're past the guard at the gate you're certified okay, you know." He chuckled. "Seems funny havin' that tall fence and barbed wire and guards these days. Why, we used to conduct regular sight-seeing parties through here. Hardly a week went by without a half-dozen classes of school children comin' out to see what-all they'd been studyin' about."

He pointed to the badge on his shirt. "Never thought I'd be havin' to prove who I am to get into this place. I been workin' here goin' onto thirty years. Hitler's sure changed things, hasn't he? Well, come on now."

He led them out of the office building and across the yard.

"Is it hot in there?" asked one of the girls doubtfully.

"Naw. Where it's really hot," declared Mr. Seely with fervor, "is in the Open Hearth Plant. We're just goin' to look at the mill. It's somethin' to see, I'll tell the world. Costs as much as a battle cruiser," he added proudly.

They entered the building and for a moment stood still, trying to adjust themselves to the enormity of the complicated machinery that stretched out before them. They felt very dwarfed and unsubstantial as they huddled at one end of the vast structure and stared at the rumbling rollers spanning the long runway. Mr. Seely was satisfied with their reaction. He was past the awed stage himself, but he demanded it as a matter of pride in others.

He began to spout a few statistics as they walked along beside the mill.

"This machine is as long as five football fields," he told them.

"It has thousands of motors and tens of thousands of movin' parts." He saw the girls eying the red block of metal that was being carried along from one set of rollers to another.

"Know how it is when you're down the basement puttin' the family wash through the wringer?" he demanded of Helen.

"Well——" she said uncertainly.

"Same principle. That steel there is as soft as a wet shirt to them heavy rolls. The thinner it gets, the faster it goes through. When we get up to the other end it'll be whistlin' by you twenty-five miles an hour!"

Later Helen remembered that he had quickened his step at this point, as if anxious to keep up with the traveling metal sheet, and they had almost trotted along beside the runway. It was this hurrying that had saved them.

When the explosion came from behind them it was like a volcano erupting, or a dozen block-buster bombs. The first great stunning noise deafened them so that the pieces of machinery spewed into the air seemed to come down as soundlessly as rain into the searing, blinding flames that had burst out from the floor. The foundations of the building shook beneath their feet, and the blazing heat from the fire scorched their skin and they must have been screaming as they ran.

Much later, when it was all over, Tom's memories of the rest of the day arranged themselves in a nightmarish design. There had been the fearful wreckage, the leaping sheets of flames, and over everything a layer of shattered glass from the skylight. The sounds of disaster roared through the hours: injured men screaming and the sirens of fire engines. Then the sizzling of cold water on hot metal and the sirens of ambulances. Later the rush of excited voices around him and always the sirens. Tom remembered carrying men out into the yard and the way the blood from the cut ones streamed over his hands. He remembered how they had tightened the tourniquets and how one of the young fellows who had driven them to the plant kept saying, "Are you okay, Dad?" over and over again, and each time they carried out a victim this young fellow would peer frantically at the burned faces, or lift the safety goggles, or, if there was no recognizable face left, just look away.

He remembered, too, the moment he bumped into a blackened, bedraggled figure helping a bloodstained man drink some brandy and the figure looked up at him and said, "Tom, you've heard about Kathleen?" And he nodded his head and went on with whatever he was doing, thinking to himself, That was Helen. She's all dirty. She's safe.

After a while he recognized Wells and Stock go past him carrying a stretcher between them and he thought, So Stock did turn up. He knew there was something else about Stock's turning up he should think about, but his head was splitting and he couldn't think.

Then a long time afterward they were in a room—it must have been Mr. Seely's office again because his cap was hanging on its hook and they were drinking coffee while a lot of people asked questions. Tom believed he was too numb to be shocked by anything more until he heard the word "sabotage" and there was a bright soundless glitter before his eyes. Then he saw the cameramen with the circular reflectors behind their flash bulbs and he thought, I didn't hear correctly; the bulbs startled me. But the word kept coming up again and again, and words like "plot" and "dynamite" were mentioned with it. Finally Tom turned to a man beside him who was writing things down in a notebook.

"What caused the explosion?" he asked. "Have they found out yet?"

He must have spoken louder than he meant to, because a disheveled gray-haired man in the center of the room turned toward him and roared:

"Hell, no! We haven't found out and we'll never find out. That's the beauty of explosives—never a trace left. But you can take it from me, that mill was dynamited as a piece of deliberate, dastardly sabotage. This is the greatest home-front crime of the war, I tell you!"

The man beside him whispered, "That's Jordan, president of McAllister Steel."

Someone else asked, "Have you any idea who could have been behind such a plot, Mr. Jordan?"

"How do I know?" Jordan's voice was loaded with fury. There were tears of fury in his eyes. "This country is honeycombed with spies and traitors doing their dirty work. Cleverest bastards in the world——"

"I understand," interrupted another man, "that hundreds of workers were to be out in the yard at twelve for a bond rally. The explosion occurred at twelve-fifteen. Would you say it was timed for the moment when fewest men would be around to notice anything?"

Before Mr. Jordan could reply a plain-clothes man wearing a police badge asked quietly, "Why wasn't the rally held at the time scheduled?"

"I can tell you why." Stock had his coat off, and his shirt was torn and stained. "They were waiting for me. I was delayed at the hotel and took a taxi out here. The driver got confused at the railroad bridge, and we were about twenty minutes finding the right entrance." His voice broke. His hands holding the paper cup of coffee shook so that the coffee sloshed over to the floor. Someone reached out and took it from him and gave him a cigarette.

There was a silence for a moment; then one of the firemen said, "Maybe it would have been worse if the rally was on. If there were a mob of people in the yard most of them would have been cut bad by the glass that flew out of the roof. Maybe not fatally—but bad. Though of course the girl——"

A reporter turned to Charlie.

"Have you a photograph of the girl who was killed?" he asked. "What's her name again?"

Charlie answered dully, "Kathleen Kennedy. Yeah, I got a picture back at the hotel." He stared out into the room. "She was one beautiful girl."

Tom remembered Kathleen as he had last seen her, smiling and talking to a couple of men carrying lunch boxes. Then the explosion. He put his face down in his hands. Somewhere deep in his brain a voice was repeating, "The taxi driver got confused at the railroad bridge, and we were about twenty minutes finding the right entrance. . . ."

That evening Tom escaped from the hotel shortly after dark and wandered aimlessly down Washington Boulevard. He wanted to get away from the reporters, the headlines, the phone calls, the nerves, the endless rehashings. As he walked he concentrated on breathing regularly and evenly and on feeling the ground solid beneath his feet. It occurred to him that part of the curious illusion he had of floating through the air might be due to not having eaten since that morning on the train. He went into a drugstore and ordered a chocolate malted milk. While he was drinking it his eyes lighted on the row of telephone booths at the back of the store. He stuffed the two crackers into his mouth, gulped the rest of his drink, and asked the cashier for a quarter's worth of nickels.

His first call was to the McAllister Steel Mills. He had some difficulty getting the line, but when he did a voice at the other end assured him that Mr. Seely had gone home. They didn't know his phone number, but his first name was Norbert.

There were several N. Seelys in the telephone book, and all of Tom's nickels were gone by the time he located the right one. Mrs. Seely was determined not to disturb her husband.

"After what he's been through, he needs a rest," she declared. "I wake him for no one."

In the cubicle of the telephone booth Tom was soaked with perspiration. He swore furiously and silently at the mouthpiece and tried one more plea.

"This is Tom Bonbright. I'm terribly sorry, but it's important."

"Tom Bonbright? The cartoonist? Oh, that's different, that is. Now just you wait."

Tom slumped against the glass door and waited. This made the whole twenty years of drawing pictures worth while.

When Mr. Seely came on he apologized again. "I wouldn't have disturbed you for anything else," he said, "but when the guard at the gate was checking our identifications this noon I must have dropped a memorandum I had in my wallet. It was important, and the guard might have picked it up. Could you tell me how to reach him?"

"I can do that, Mr. Bonbright." Mr. Seely's voice was a good deal less cheery than it had been that morning. "His name is Neilson. Wait, I'll give you his number." There was a rattling of book pages. "Cedar 6585—that's it." Tom jotted the number down beneath two hearts and an arrow carved into the wall of the booth.

After he said good-by to Mr. Seely he went out to get another five nickels from the cashier, and when he returned his booth was occupied. A girl with tight sausagelike curls all over the back of her head was wedged in for what sounded like a heavy conversation. Tom hung around outside the door for so long that the drug clerk began to notice him.

In ordinary clothes the drug clerk would have looked simply like a bald man nearing fifty. But in this store he wore a starched white coat, and when he bore down upon Tom he was as impressive as a chief surgeon.

"The other booths are unoccupied," he pointed out in a tone as cutting as a scalpel.

"I know. But I wrote a number down in that one," Tom confessed miserably. I have sunk to a defacer of public walls, he thought, and blushed beneath the scornful gaze of the chief surgeon.

At last the girl emerged from the booth and Tom called Mr. Neilson, who was extremely apologetic for not having seen the lost memorandum.

"Just one other thing," said Tom casually. "Do you remember what time Mr. Stock arrived in his taxi this noon?"

"I don't remember anyone in a taxi, sir."

"You know, the gentleman we were waiting for to begin the rally."

"Oh, him, sir. He came up a minute before the explosion. He was in a big black car with another man and a chauffeur. I was just going out to speak to him when we heard that terrific blast, sir."

Tom's hand gripped the receiver. He could hardly wait to say good-by to Mr. Neilson and put his ideas in order.

When he left the drugstore the chief surgeon and the cashier peered after him. He thought, The explosion has put the whole town on the lookout for suspicious characters. If they find that number in the booth and trace it to one of the McAllister guards—I'll be doing some fancy explaining.

He was amused for a moment with the ramifications of this probability—but only for a moment. He had something much more interesting to think about.

12

THERE WAS NOTHING on the train that really belonged to Kathleen. Her bags had been packed and sent to her family in Newark, New Jersey, and everything had been put into them, even the magazines she had brought and the half-used flat of cigarettes. There was nothing left except the empty seat where she had sat for the past week; yet to those who had been trouping with her there was something about the seat that made it belong to the dead girl as much as if her name had been painted on it.

It was the memory each of them had of the top of her yellow pompadour just visible over its back, of her long smooth legs swung over its arm as she wrote her letters to the corporal, of the silver fountain pen that was always disappearing in the crevices around the cushion.

When they walked into the car the next day it was impossible not to look at the empty place and remember. Every newspaper they carried had a front-page spread of the story with a large picture of Kathleen and the damaged Rolling Mill side by side, so that as they set their things down there she was, smiling up at them from every seat but her own.

For a while after the train started no one spoke. They had talked themselves out all night long. They had felt a compulsion to keep telling each other over and over what had happened and what their reactions were. It had seemed that their nerves would never be quiet, their ears never stop resounding with that blinding, crashing noise of the explosion. Now that they were on the way again and life was going on as scheduled they began to feel a numbness from the tragedy and the shock. The girls' faces were dead white beneath their make-up. Charlie's hand shook so that the newspaper print he was reading jumped before his eyes and blurred. Nadine sat with her hands in her lap, looking out the window, but no matter where she focused her eyes she kept seeing the searing flash of the flame and then the black, broken pieces of machinery that had gone hurtling into the air like jackstraws. Wilbur Kahn moved over to the piano once, but he didn't play. He sat on the bench and examined a piece of music minutely, as if he had never seen a note of it before.

From behind his newspaper Tom glanced up ahead at the large standing ash tray beside Stock's seat. It was full of cigarettes half smoked. Every once in a while Stock's hand would reach out to crush another one, his fingers manipulating the butt around for a moment or two, pushing the ashes into little piles. Then he'd strike a match and start smoking again.

The questions about Stock that Tom had lain awake all night asking himself remained unanswered. How could he find the answers with no time and no clues? Stock had lied and said he had come out to the plant in a cab. Why? Who was the man in the big black car with the chauffeur? Was it his phone call that Stock had been waiting for at the hotel? Or was there no call at all? Was that merely a ruse to assure Stock's arriving late—late enough to escape the explosion? Then did Stock know about the explosion beforehand—and about the timing? Who was he, really? Was he as guilty as the man who'd actually placed the explosives in the mill? Fantastic. But the parts fell into place so neatly. To Tom the pull of curiosity was irresistible.

He had gone down to see the switchboard operators in the hotel that morning.

"I'm in 912," he told them, the lies beginning to fall glibly from his own lips by now. "I made an important call yesterday morning—and I've lost the phone number. Have you a record of it by any chance?"

The operator who took care of the ninth floor had blinked at him. "We don't keep a record of local calls," she said. "If I wrote it down it's in the incinerator by now."

It was what he had expected, of course. And how many hundreds of people in Detroit had big black cars and chauffeurs? And pretty soon it was time to get the train for Chicago.

But the questions still danced around in his head and he wished he could get one bright idea—just one. He wondered how Sergeant Boyd or Lieutenant Stacy would have tackled this problem.

Helen was sitting behind him. He had turned around to look at her once. Her head was leaned back against her seat and her eyes were closed. This was the first time he had seen her relaxed, unconscious of anyone watching her. Her skin looked almost transparent against her black hair and the scarlet downcurve of her mouth. Tom could see the slight markings around her eyes and in her cheeks where they creased when she laughed, the angular bone of her jaw and the hollows under it. Her face mirrored what she had so recently lived through with compassionate accuracy. This is how she'll look when she's older, Tom thought, when her life has been lived longer.

Stock was the first one to speak. He leaned over to Tom with his newspaper, sliding his finger along one paragraph.

"Read that," he said.

Tom read:

. . . Crews of men working all night repaired some of the damaged strip mill so that part operation will be resumed today. Workers at the McAllister Mill voted to increase their working hours until all lost time is made up. Some steel has been diverted to the Kalway Mill where workers, as a tribute to those killed in the McAllister explosion, will work overtime to get production out. Howard Jordan, president of McAllister Steel, estimated that production lost through the explosion would be made up within a month. . . .

"That ought to give scant satisfaction to the saboteurs, whoever they are." Tom pushed the paper back at him and watched his face keenly.

Aside from weariness, Stock's face was as expressionless as a clothes dummy's. Only his eyes, so exposed-looking without brows or lashes, lighted with an emotion that puzzled Tom. It seemed to be one of satisfaction.

"It proves, does it not, Mr. Bonbright, that we have nothing to fear from so-called physical sabotage? That is," he added quickly, "from the point of view of morale. Lives may be endangered, yes, but never our will for victory."

"I think that's true," said Nadine, who had turned around with relief at the sound of voices speaking normally. "This kind of thing only draws us all closer together—makes us want to fight all the more." Her hands clenched. "After seeing what happened I'd give anything to work in that mill—to take the place of someone they killed—just to show them that that kind of thing doesn't stop us; it makes us work harder." She hesitated, shy after her outburst. "When the tour is over," she said softly, "I'm going to get a job in a plant somewhere."

"You see?" Stock made an approving gesture toward the girl, and her eyes warmed to his with obvious fervor.

Why, she has fallen for him, thought Tom, just as Helen said. It was a curious thing—this young collegiate female who should, by rights, be yearning over a soldier her own age, and was instead infatuated with the older, worldlier Stock. But she wasn't an ordinary girl, Tom reminded himself. An ordinary girl might have found Stock with his burns and nervous hands gruesome. Nadine romanticized them.

Tom's mind fled back to a conversation he had had long ago with another romantic young girl. That one had just been married to Joe, the proprietor of the spaghetti restaurant to which he had taken Helen the Friday before.

"How can you want to look at a face like that for the rest of your natural life?" he had joked with her. "That husband of yours has enough scars on him to double for a road map."

She had laughed. "The scars make him so mysterious, I think."

"Mysterious! Didn't he tell you he got them in a disgustingly ordinary drunken-driving accident?"

"Of course. I don't think of that when I look at them. I think only that he has lived through something, that he has suffered. To me he is a man of experience, and to me that is the most attractive thing in the world."

While Tom had been recalling how the words had sounded spoken with a slight Italian accent, how her dark eyes had been as impressionable as Nadine's were now, Charlie had joined the conversation.

"Of course stuff like that won't lick us," he was saying. "It wouldn't rate as more than a damn nuisance if—if it hadn't killed somebody."

"Total war," one of the girls said gravely. "Now I understand what they mean when they say we're all at the front. Even dancers like us."

Then there was the click of the compartment door opening, and Mr. Wells walked into the car and joined them. He carried a flat square box which he put down on the table. In the hard light of the window opposite he looked haggard, his eyes sunken into the puffs of flesh that had appeared around them.

Each of the others, watching him, had a swift personal recollection of the part he had played the day before. His calm voice that spoke the right words to quiet the moans of an injured man, his face grimy and set as he strained to lift another onto a stretcher, later his long-fingered hands directing an emergency hose where it would do the most good. The biggest role they had seen him in had been on this side of the footlights, real and terrible, and he had filled it as competently as he had ever filled a make-believe one. Everyone sitting there would have liked to say something to him about it, but they felt constrained in his presence. His withdrawn formality hadn't changed, his aloofness, his preoccupation with some private sorrow; these things were all there and made them hesitate.

He broke the silence himself. First he reached over and began to unwrap the package he had brought in.

"When the bombings in London got very bad," he said with the same tone he might have used to say, "Once upon a time," to a group of restless, unhappy children, "all of us from the theater spent the nights in a near-by shelter. The scream of a bomb falling out of the heavens is not something one can sleep through—and we were on edge and frightened. Then one time a stagehand brought in a game like this." He drew out a gaily colored target with a red bull's-eye in the center and around it concentric circles of blue, green, and yellow. "We played for hours. It took our minds off the raid. I used to wonder what the Nazi bombardiers would have said if they had seen us exerting ourselves to direct one of these things"—he held up a handful of feather-tipped darts—"into the bull's-eye while they were dropping tons of explosives upon us. Might have discouraged them, don't you think?"

He glanced anxiously around at them. "I saw this toy on a stand in the station, and it reminded me of those days and that what we went through yesterday was a bit like a bombing."

One side of the compartment at the front of the car made a flat wall. He walked over and held the target against it.

"If we could fasten this here," he said, "we might try our skill at it. The vibrations of the train will, I dare say, add to the sport."

When the steward came through a short while later to announce dinner he found he was interrupting a well-organized contest. Charlie was keeping score, and several club-car checks were dependent on the results. Daniel Stock had been the first to welcome Mr. Wells's suggestion of the game, and they soon discovered that he was very skilled at it. Even the car's swaying as they sped along did not throw him off. The little pin-pointed darts flew from his fingers almost always to the center of the red circle.

The others caught on with varying degrees of success. Tom was one of the worst. No matter how intently he aimed at the bull's-eye he would come out with a five or a ten.

"I guess I'm not the athletic type," Tom apologized. "My idea of sport is to sit in the sun on Lake Sokosu and let the bass jump into my canoe. I am, by intention, a lazy man."

"It's easy to be lazy at Sokosu," said Nadine. Her face was flushed with enjoyment. Next to Stock's, her score was the highest and it had drawn his attention to her. "The lake is like a shining mirror," she told them. "You can see the mountain reflected in it and the green firs that grow around it like a frame. It's the kind of place where you just want to sit and be peaceful."

Stock grunted as he drew back his arm and released his dart. It struck the circumference of the red circle and stayed there, quivering.

"So you've been to this wonderful vacation land of Mr. Bonbright's too?" he said.

"I spent lots of summers near there. At a girls' camp. One of those overorganized places with activities scheduled for every minute. That's where I learned to throw darts."

"Now that the secret of your success is explained, Miss Hall," said Mr. Wells, "I should be interested in learning Mr. Stock's."

The beams shot genially from Stock's eyes. Oh, but he's feeling good, thought Tom, and he wondered why he was so irritated at his own ineptness with the little arrows.

"My lessons," said Stock, "were learned in surroundings less gentle than a girls' camp. As a matter of fact, the Portuguese fishermen down on the Provincetown docks taught me. I used to hang around there to paint—and I always ended up throwing knives. Those fellows could split a toothpick. I've just applied the same principle to the darts."

It was Tom's turn to throw. He tensed himself and squinted at the target. The dart went wide of its mark, and Judy ducked just in time.

"Hey!" she shouted. "Give Tom a lesson, will you, Mr. Stock? It's getting dangerous around here."

"Delighted." Stock's mouth spread with amusement.

"Okay," said Tom. "What's wrong with the way I do it? I'm willing to learn." I'm willing to learn a lot of things from you, he thought, feeling anger rise up in his throat, wincing with aversion as Stock took his arm and began to manipulate it so that the shoulder joint revolved.

"The first thing is to relax, Mr. Bonbright. Loosen up as you do when you draw." Stock's voice was mocking. "You must pretend to be unaware that the eyes of all these lovely young ladies are upon you."

Helen laughed. The sound of it was sharp and too loud. Tom glanced at her, remembering her words: *When he touched me I got rigid. I was afraid to move away.*

"The whole thing depends on a wrist movement," Stock was saying. "You must keep your wrist open—or cocked is the word, I think—until the last possible moment. Then as your arm comes forward keep your eyes on the target and snap your wrist. So!" He demonstrated with a dart. The pin dove into the bull's-eye.

"Miss Hall does it correctly. Watch her." He looked around at the others. "If it's agreeable to all of you Miss Hall and I will play off a game of, say, five hundred points. Then you can study that wrist movement."

"Swell!" Nadine's eyes were pathetically eager. "What do we play for?"

"If I win you must help me hunt down the best steak in Chicago. If you win I'll help you."

"A gentleman gambler!" exclaimed Charlie.

Stock began to pace off the distance from the target. Behind his back Tom's eyes met Helen's. They were both thinking the same thing. What does he want with that nice kid?

13

THE LINE OF PASSENGERS waiting in the station was much longer than the line of available taxis. Several minutes after the rest of the troupe, packed into two cabs, had gone off to the hotel, Tom found himself on the platform with Mr. Wells and a crowd of other people, waiting for more cars to drive up.

"It isn't very far, you know," said Mr. Wells after they had vainly tried to flag the few cabs that came in. "I don't mind a walk, if you don't." Tom glanced dubiously at his suitcase and the bulky portfolio. "Oh yes, of course. Your drawing things will make it difficult. We'll wait then. Bound to be one along soon."

There was a man standing a dozen feet from them farther up the platform. He hadn't moved a muscle or blinked an eye, yet Tom could have sworn he was listening intently to this insignificant conversation. Tom was reminded of the posters he had drawn for the OPP "Loose Talk" campaign. In each of them had appeared an ordinary man, unremarkable save for his ears, which were swollen to the size of big balloons.

He got the same feeling from the listener up ahead as he had meant to convey in those posters. The man's ears, however, were of the properly normal size, and he was far from ordinary-looking. The heavy, firm flesh of his face was tanned, as if he had spent lots of time on a golf course, and his deeper tan suit had been tailored by a genius. His own square bag rested at his feet. As Tom was watching him he raised his hand in a commanding gesture and a taxi drew up in front of him.

"What the devil!" exclaimed Mr. Wells. "We've been waiting longer. Maybe he'll share it."

They started over, but the taxi door had slammed. They were just in time to see it drive off, the sunburned neck and gray hair of its passenger showing through the back window in solitary luxury.

This is where I came in, thought Tom. I've seen all this before and not so long ago either. He knew now. This was the man he had seen with Senator Carlinger that Friday when he got off the train from Washington. Tom remembered the same smooth look, the pigskin luggage, but more of it, the same authoritative gesture at the cabdriver, and the senator's words: "I just got an offer from Lawrence Kenyon . . . law firm in Detroit. . . . I'm not going to take it."

Tom had wondered at the time why he wasn't going to take it. Now curiosity pricked at him more strongly. He recalled that Senator Carlinger's keen face had seemed blurred with worry and discouragement. Not at all the mood in which one spurns a glossy law firm. Could the reason be that the senator did not intend again to be the victim of misdirected judgment? That he would not again, blinded by his own good faith and sincerity, be trapped into a questionable position? But, Tom reminded himself quickly, I am assuming there is something questionable about Mr. Kenyon, when all he's done is snatch our cab. His eyes searched the empty taxi ramp.

"Come on," he told Mr. Wells, "let's walk. I'll manage all right."

As they hurried up Michigan Boulevard the few blocks to the hotel Tom tried to make conversation.

"That was a good idea of yours—that dart game," he said.

"Yes, wasn't it?"

"I'm going to practice for the rest of the trip. That's one thing I ought to be able to lick."

"Possibly Mr. Stock can give you some help. There's a trick to it, you know. My son is very good at that sort of thing—he said it's the same in golf or tennis. The wrist movement, I judge."

"You must be very proud of your son," said Tom. "The R.A.F. has been doing an incredible job."

"Yes. They're good lads." The clipped syllables stopped abruptly. Mr. Wells volunteered no further information, and Tom welcomed the silence. He wanted to think about Mr. Lawrence Kenyon. He didn't know why it mattered. It wasn't unusual for men traveling about a lot to run into each other now and then. Often people who recognized him acted in the same manner—listened or watched him and tried to appear as if they were doing neither. If it wasn't for the senator, Tom thought, I wouldn't be bothered with it. He recalled what the Cleveland police lieutenant had told him: "In our work we don't make the mistake of discounting too much for coincidence." Anyway, he just didn't like Mr. Kenyon, a feeling which evidently gave him a common bond with Senator Carlinger.

When they reached the hotel the desk clerk told them that Mr. Ross had already registered for them.

"There were several bags of mail for you, Mr. Bonbright," the clerk added. "I've sent them up to your room—1201, I think." He consulted his board. "No. Mr. Stock is in 1201. You are in 1203, adjoining it." Tom heard this announcement with great dissatisfaction. "Mr. Wells is across the hall in 1202," the clerk was saying. "Please let us know if there is anything we can do to make you more comfortable."

Tom hesitated. But if I asked them to change my room what could I use for an excuse? he thought. He followed Mr. Wells to the elevators.

After their show at the Great Lakes Naval Training Station that evening Tom saw that several hundred middy collars lying across several hundred strong young backs blocked the way between himself and Helen. He had wanted to take her someplace for a drink and a quiet talk, but he knew when he was licked. Perhaps it was just as well though. He had a lot of work to catch up with, and the bags of mail in his room needed going over. They were the accumulation of a week's letters to him from newspaper readers.

A Broadway columnist had once cracked that "the handsomest male stars in Hollywood would like to receive as much fan mail as Tom Bonbright, whose face will never get him a screen test." Tom had not been on speaking terms with that scribe since—only for the reason that he resented the words "fan mail." It was far too frivolous a description of the letters he received, not about himself, but about how people were feeling and thinking about the world and everything going on in it. These outpourings were infinitely more important than fan mail.

As he walked out through the large modern lounge of the station he was joined by Stock and Nadine. Nadine's eyes were bright with anticipation.

"I'm about to collect the prize I won on the train," she said to Tom. "We're going out to supper!" She took Stock's arm. "I never dreamt knowing how to throw darts was going to come in so handy."

Tom imagined he heard her laughter again and again as he walked back to the hotel—only sometimes it seemed more like a sob than a laugh. He stopped into three bars for three drinks on the way, before the sound got out of his ears.

A dim, halfhearted electric sign above an English basement entrance announced simply "Jay's Steak House."

Stock led Nadine down the steps and pushed open the door.

They were met by a waiter in dark trousers and a wilted white shirt, his sleeves rolled up to his elbows. "I'm sorry," he said, "the kitchen is closing."

In the light of the squat red candles that burned on every table they could see that there were still several people eating. An odor of wax and grilled meat and beer hung pleasantly in the air. In a corner a juke box was playing "Star Dust."

"Is Jay here?" Stock asked the waiter.

"No sir. Jay's gone out. Are you a friend of Jay's?"

"Yes. My name is Stock. Daniel Stock. I guess I'm a bit early. I told Jay I'd be around tomorrow night, but this young lady was in need of a good steak and——"

The waiter's eyes flickered. "We can give you a steak and some pie and coffee," he said; "no vegetables or French fries left now."

Stock nodded, and they followed the waiter to a side table facing the entrance.

Nadine said, "How did you discover this place? It's so out of the way, and the outside looks so——"

"It doesn't look like much," Stock admitted. "When I was in Chicago a couple of years ago someone told me about it. Since then I've sent dozens of people and not a complaint yet."

"We'll have to tell Charlie and the others."

"No. I'd rather not." Stock leaned over the table toward her. His tone was intimate and confidential. "It isn't glamorous enough for them. They'll call it a hole in the wall. Let them go to the Ambassador or wherever they want. We'll keep this between us."

"You know"—Nadine looked around at the sawdust on the floor, the row of decorated beer steins on a shelf that ran the length of the room, the people hunched cozily over their coffee at the tables—"I think this place has lots of atmosphere. I mean it has a mood about it. Expensive restaurants all look alike. This is different. It's a—a setting."

Stock laughed. He lifted the candle to his cigarette. "A setting for what, for example?"

The flame's little light played upon his face, and she glanced compassionately at the cruel burn along his cheek. How mysterious he looked, she thought. How much there must be to discover behind the handsome mask of his features. She put her head to the side in a way she had when she was thinking seriously.

"One has a feeling things can happen here," she said. "It's a wonderful place to meet someone or say good-by forever to someone, or fall in love with someone——"

"Good lord. You are a romantic little creature, aren't you?"

Some wax from the candle had hardened onto the table top, and Nadine scratched at it with her nail. So that's how he thought of her—as a little creature.

"Maybe it's that juke-box music," she said suddenly. "I was in love one whole summer to the tune of that song. I never hear it without thinking of that summer."

"And are you still in love?"

"Oh no. Not with *him*. That was just a camp affair. He was a counselor at a boys' camp across the lake."

"Sokosu?"

"No, a bigger lake near there. Why? Have you ever been up to Sokosu?"

"No, I heard you mention it to Tom Bonbright the other day."

"That's right; he has a cabin up there—but there aren't any camps on that lake. It's still very wild and undeveloped. There isn't even an auto road all the way up. I guess that's why he likes it."

"How does he get up there?"

"The nearest railroad stop is Monmouth. From there you drive about eight miles to Essex, and from there you have to get to the lake on foot. All the supplies have to be carried in about six miles."

"Sounds like a lot of trouble just to get some privacy."

"It's worth it though. It's beautiful." Nadine's eyes lighted with the beginnings of a hope. "You'd find a lot to paint around there. I'll be your guide if you ever come up. We used to hike over from camp to climb the mountain. It's the only one around with a ranger's tower on it."

Stock laughed. "I'll think about it," he said. "I'm not much of a painter, you know."

The waiter set two sizzling platters before them on the bare oak table and knives and forks.

"By the way," Stock asked, "have you any wine? Burgundy?"

"Yes sir. By the bottle."

"Bring one then."

Nadine's face glowed. "This is a party! I'm so glad we came." She looked at the platters before them. "I know I ought to feel guilty, but I don't."

"Guilty about what?"

"Oh, having such a wonderful time when the world is such a mess." The waiter had brought the wine. As he poured it into their glasses some of it dripped onto the napkin that was wrapped around the bottle, staining the white cloth a blood red. Nadine stared at it. "And after what happened in Detroit," she said soberly, "all those people hurt and Kathleen——"

Stock reached across the table and took her hand. "Don't think about it," he said. "Don't think about anything like that tonight. Here"—he pushed the glass toward her—"let's have a drink. What shall we drink to?"

"To Sokosu!"

"What!" The word shot out of him. He gaped at her in amazement.

"That means victory in Indian. We used to have a camp cheer about it."

Stock's fingers slid rhythmically up and down the narrow stem of his glass. "But it's the name of a lake, isn't it?" he asked.

"A lake and a mountain. It's from the dialect of some New England tribe. I forget which. I suppose they won a battle there or something."

Stock raised his glass and touched hers. "All right then. To Sokosu."

After a while they were almost alone in the restaurant. The other diners had paid their checks and left. The electric sign above the door was turned out. The waiter had disappeared into the kitchen. In its corner the juke box was playing the song Helen sang in the show.

"That's one ballad I can do without." Stock's voice was harsh. "Five times a day for a week now is enough."

"Helen sings it very well though." The bottle of wine was almost gone. Nadine was feeling very content and full of generosity. "She's beautiful, isn't she?"

"Is she? A lot too hard and too independent to be a real woman. When I'm with her I feel like"—he smiled distantly over the candle flame—"like taking a whip to her—like taming her——"

His words blurred as they came through the mellow haze that surrounded Nadine. She knew there was something about them that was all wrong, but it didn't matter. His voice was so smooth, so gentle.

"I prefer a woman like you," he was saying. "I like softness and trustingness and innocence."

He pushed back her chair and came over to help her up. Why must this night ever end? she thought. It was nearly the most wonderful night of her life.

In the taxi Stock kept his arm about her, and in the hotel and in the elevator on the way up to their floor. It was a hard arm, muscled and full of might. She could feel its strength through her thin dress. It made her feel—how had he put it?—trusting and soft. It protected her and her innocence. She was glad she hadn't concocted lies to make him think her sophisticated. Helen Hathaway was sophisticated, but some men didn't like that. Some men thought it unwomanly. Daniel—the name felt wonderful on her tongue—thought it was unwomanly.

When they got to her door he turned the key for her and opened it. Then he kissed her, his lips hard on her mouth and the grasp of his hands hurting her shoulders. But she liked the pain. She liked his masterfulness.

She didn't care, either, that Tom Bonbright had seen them as they stood there in the hall. While she was closing her door she heard Stock say to him, "Just coming in?"

"Yes," Tom answered. "Good night."

"Good night."

Their doors banged shut simultaneously.

In the center of his room Tom stood irresolute. The truth was that he had been just going out for a nightcap but changed his mind when he saw them. He'd be damned, he thought, if he'd leave his personal possessions alone with only a connecting door between them and the curious Mr. Stock. Anyhow, he didn't want to stay up too late because, unless he was greatly mistaken, his neighbor would be going out in the morning, and Tom meant to go out along with him. It would be his first attempt at shadowing anyone and he wanted to be on the alert.

But all this practical reasoning couldn't take away the fact that he was thirsty. Not to be able to get a drink when he was thirsty was another discomfort that could be blamed on Stock. He hadn't thought it possible, but his dislike of the man actually grew right then.

14

IT WASN'T EASY. It wasn't easy at all. They had been out just a few minutes, and Tom was beginning to feel the strain. He kept a good half block between himself and Stock and tried to saunter casually along, his lips pursed for a carefree whistle, his hands in his pockets. No one, of course, could know that his hands were bunched into fists or that the shopwindows he was examining with such interest might have been full of purple cows and he not have known it. Once he lost sight of the tall lean figure ahead. The tan felt hat, the swinging shoulders had vanished. Damn it, this is a job for a professional, he thought. I'll waste a lot of time and find out nothing. He was ready to turn back when it occurred to him that they had left the hotel without breakfasting. There was a coffee shop on the next corner. No doubt Stock had gone in.

Tom joined a crowd of people waiting at a bus stop across the street and, congratulating himself upon this camouflage, watched the restaurant from there. Four busses went by before he was rewarded. His quarry came out of the coffee shop and continued up the boulevard. The thought of Stock comfortably fortified with orange juice, toast, and coffee while he himself remained quite empty did not add to Tom's pleasure in his task.

The next few minutes almost made his sacrifice useless. Stock entered the lobby of a tall office building and walked directly to a loaded elevator in the rear. Its doors had clanged shut on him before Tom dared to follow, and then he stared helplessly at the lights over them. The one marked thirty-five flashed first. But how could he be sure that was where Stock got off? He stood for a minute watching people go in and out of the other elevators, not knowing what to do. Then he was joined by two men and a girl who planted themselves knowingly in front of this one.

When the doors slid open again, the attendant said, "Special to WGTR." Tom and his three companions walked in, and the rapid noiseless climb began again. So that's it, Tom thought, and what do I do when I get there?

The reception room of the radio station was absorbently carpeted in a bright red. A pretty girl in a matching red dress sat at the information desk, talking on the phone. Tom had time to see this and to see also a familiar back in a familiar light suit disappearing down a corridor. He crossed the room and followed quickly. Small offices lined the hallway, the name plates of the occupants sticking out from above their doors like street signs. From a safe distance away he could observe which one Stock went into. It was marked "Amy Bissell."

Tom went back into the reception room and picked up a mimeographed program from a pile on the information desk. Amy Bissell's news broadcast was scheduled daily from 11 to 11:15 A.M. He had about a half-hour to wait. He considered barricading himself behind a newspaper in one of the deep chairs about the room, but he was afraid that when the pretty girl at the desk ended her telephone conversation she would begin asking him some questions. At the moment he didn't have any answers. He chose a corridor on the other side of the room away from Amy Bissell's office and started down it. Everyone he passed was hurrying somewhere with an air of busy preoccupation.

Tom crushed his hat under his arm and put a busy look on his face too. The first door he tried was a practice studio; a trio of girls and a man with a mouth organ were giving forth hillbilly tunes. In the next room an audience of women was listening to a man broadcast recipes. Tom consulted his program: "10:30, The Kitcheneer." The next room was marked "Studio D." It was empty save for a piano and a microphone. In a narrow space divided from the actual studio by a glass partition were rows of folding chairs for observers. Tom chose an end seat well in the shadow and sat down. The clock on the studio wall said 10:35. The voice of the Kitcheneer came clearly through the loud speaker. He was giving the ladies a recipe for eggs à la Benedict.

Tom shut out this new stimulation to his hunger. He tried to recall what he had heard about Amy Bissell. That she was the most popular morning news broadcaster in the Middle West was general information. He himself had listened to her often over the Gray network, which took in hundreds of stations. Her greatest followers were women, naturally, though she never seemed to distort the news to find a woman's angle. Tom remembered hearing her name mentioned in Washington along with that of Raymond Gram Swing and Lowell Thomas and Raymond Clapper. He combed his memory for any details he had picked up about her and wished fervently that he had listened to certain conversations when he had had the opportunity. Try as he did, he could think of no word, no rumor even, that Amy Bissell's slant was peculiar or that she had any axes to grind. He recalled that once someone's wife at a party had spoken of her approvingly because "she gives me the news—not her own idea of what the news is."

What possible business Stock could have with her he couldn't even guess. It might turn out to be of a purely personal nature. Perhaps they were friends—or lovers. In that case his morning was wasted. Still it was difficult to think of Stock in the role of a lover. The word implied too much. Tom could imagine him bestowing an amount of detached affection on a pet—on a kitten, or Nadine, for instance. But anything further would imply a softening of his shell. An impossibility.

While he was thinking this over the door opened and a short man with a flat nose and thick round horn-rimmed glasses that made him look like a frog walked in, followed by Helen Hathaway and Charlie. Tom sat rigid with amazement, watching them. Since the microphone in the studio was dead and the walls soundproof, he could hear nothing they said, and none of them so much as glanced up at the shadowy observation booth. The froglike little man went immediately to the microphone and lowered it to his level. He carried two scripts in his hand, one of which he handed to Helen. Charlie began to read it over her shoulder. He crossed out something with his pencil, and there was a short discussion. Helen paced the room, flinging her hair back and reading. She wore something black and white and artfully draped. The Frog couldn't take his eyes off her.

Cautiously Tom consulted his program. "Ten forty-five," he read, "About Town with Seymour Abbott." The hands on the clock pointed to one minute before 10:45. The Kitcheneer was signing off until a delicious cheese soufflé tomorrow. Suddenly a red-haired man glided into the studio and held up his fingers in warning. Chimes sounded. The microphone in the studio came alive. "This is Station WGTR in Chicago," announced the red-haired man. He backed away and glided from the room.

The Frog took over. "Good morning, everybody. This is your faithful reporter, Seymour Abbott, who's been all around town in the last twenty-four hours and is here to tell you all about it." His voice was surprisingly consistent with his appearance—a husky croak.

"Now here is the first item I've picked up, and what an item! She wasn't easy to pick up either. I had to fight my way through a solid mass of admirers. But Abbott never lets you down, does he, folks? I want you to meet Miss Helen Hathaway, gorgeous star of the OPP Bond Selling Caravan. Now step right up here and say hello to everybody, Miss Hathaway."

Helen bent lovingly close to the microphone.

"Hello, everybody!"

"She's a brunette, folks," continued the Frog. "Five feet five from the tip of her beautiful head to the tips of her beautiful toes. And what a smile! I bet Mayor La Guardia had to issue her a special order to a dim-out when she was playing on Broadway. And what big smoky gray eyes. I want you all to come and see her for yourselves at the big bond rally tomorrow night at the Lake Theater. Wear asbestos, folks! Remember! Where there's smoke there's fire!"

Tom's empty stomach turned over sickly. He wriggled in his seat with embarrassment. The sudden movement attracted Helen's attention. Her eyes narrowed to two stormy slits. Spots of red glowed on her cheekbones. When she answered the Frog's next question, which was something about how did she like Chicago, her voice shook. Charlie glanced at her and followed her eyes to Tom. He grinned. Helen was going to be awfully mad at Bonbright for pushing in like that.

The Frog was immersed in the charms of his own phrases and hadn't noticed.

"And now, Miss Hathaway," he was saying, "you've been in our windy city for a day; you've met a lot a people. What do you think of us Chicagoans?"

" 'I adore them, Mr. Abbott,' " Helen read from the script. Her voice was firm now, but with anger, not adoration. " 'Out here people seem to laugh more, to breathe deeper, to be pulsating with life. I love the swinging strides of the men, the frank wind-kissed faces of the women——' "

There were a few additional lines of this, and then Helen sang a song and said, "Good-by, everybody," and she and Charlie left the studio. They were more fortunate than Tom who, since

Amy Bissell was broadcasting from Studio A, felt it was safer to stay put. For five minutes he had to listen to the Frog relate the romances, near romances, and split romances of various Chicago ladies and gents who seemed to have been kissed by more than the wind.

When the "About Town" interval was over Tom recognized the announcer's voice coming from Studio A, and then Amy Bissell was on. She spoke in a pleasant forthright tone, enunciating her words clearly. Her voice showed no emotion except definiteness. She handed out her dispatches with the air of having received them from God Almighty. She allowed no doubt or uncertainty about anything. Tom felt her manner would get his back up if he listened to her daily, but he realized there was an appeal in it too. It offered security in the midst of rumor and contradiction.

He recalled that she herself looked like a secure person. She was a tall slender woman with near-white hair that framed an almost masculine-featured face. Her skin and eyes were clear. He remembered that, seeing her photograph, he had felt that she looked smart and sure of herself.

He was brought sharply out of this memory by an unusual tremor of excitement in the Bissell voice. She had evidently just been handed an AP dispatch.

"The Department of Justice has just announced," she said, "that agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation have arrested three men in Detroit for plotting the McAllister Steel Mill explosion which two days ago wrecked the Rolling Mill Plant and caused the death of eleven persons. FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover said the men, all American-born laborers, admitted being inspired by Axis sympathies.

"Under questioning the men admitted that plans for the explosion had been laid weeks ago. The sudden news that a bond-selling caravan was to appear at the plant on the chosen day had confused their arrangements, so that only part of the contemplated damage was carried out. Kathleen Kennedy, a dancer with the Caravan, was among those killed by the explosion."

That noon before they set out from the hotel for their appearances at the Chicago war plants Tom read the same story in the newspapers. From all accounts it appeared that the explosion was directed by sabotage agents of the enemy. Reluctantly Tom admitted to himself that his hunch in Detroit might well have been wild. Weeks ago, when the explosion was planned, neither the OPP nor Charlie nor Stock knew if or when the Caravan was to appear at the McAllister Mills. Stock's tardy arrival that day must be put down to coincidence—just a lucky coincidence—until more facts came to light. He saw Helen ahead of him in the lobby. When he reached her and touched her shoulder she swung around and glared at him. For a moment he couldn't think why.

"Are you going to be busy this evening?" he asked. "After the show? I thought we might——"

"Yes," she snapped at him. "I am going to be terribly busy from now on—every moment that you are free. You—you Peeping Tom!"

Tom accepted his rebuke without trying to explain. "Where there's smoke, there's fire," the Frog had said. Then it struck him that this might also apply to Stock. The McAllister fire had not been the right one, but there might be still another. He was glad Helen had turned him down. If following Stock had led to Amy Bissell that morning, following Stock might lead to something more enlightening that night. He was relieved to find himself a free agent.

15

Tom's venture into sleuthing was less difficult that night than it had been in the morning. The Caravan had given a performance at the Chicago Stage Door Canteen, which was located in a busy downtown section of the city. Afterward it had been a simple matter for Tom to bid Stock good night as he got into a cab, step into the next cab himself, and let the driver do the rest. After twenty minutes Stock got out in front of an old house in a shabby neighborhood. Tom had his driver go on for a block before he dismissed him. Then he walked back to the corner.

The street was narrow and the buildings on it had been put there with no particular plan. They were a queer mixture. Houses with "Rooms" signs alternated with gas stations and clumps of one-story shops. One store window, a jeweler's, was lighted by a dim bulb, and an iron grille drawn across it was padlocked. Tom stood in the rain, his coat collar drawn up about his face, his hat crushed down, staring up the street. First there was the stretch of shiny black sidewalk, then the winking green neon sign, "Beer—Liquor," then the outlines of the house where Stock had disappeared. While he stood there two men who had passed him a moment before walked under the green sign and then they, too, vanished, as if they had been swallowed up by the earth.

It could do no harm, Tom thought, to saunter past and inspect the place. The rain was a cool mist on his face as he started toward it. Ahead of him a car lurched through the puddles near the curb and came to a stop in front of the house. Two men and two women got out and went in. Although the green sign made everything beyond it seem blacker Tom couldn't understand why he never saw a door open to admit these visitors. He lingered for a moment in front of the jewelry shop, his heart thumping rapidly in his chest. This was not so simple as walking up a crowded boulevard in the bright sun, as he had done that morning.

When he continued on up the sidewalk he heard footsteps behind him. He slowed up and the footsteps slowed up too. He was assailed by a sudden terror that it was Roger Tally and he began to run. He sprinted past the "Beer—Liquor" place. Inside he could see a scarred wooden bar and a few people perched like crows on the stools before it. The footsteps behind him ceased. Whoever it was had gone into the bar. He slowed down to catch his breath and to get rid of the shock of fright that had overwhelmed him. Can't be jumpy like that, he reproached himself. The idea is that you're following someone. No one's following you. All the same, he wished he knew for sure that Tally was, at this moment, dishing out flapjacks in Atlanta.

Finally he was abreast of the house that Stock and the others had entered, and now he understood why they had seemed to drop into the ground. A steep flight of steps led directly down from the sidewalk to the door of an English basement. The window in the door and the wide showcaselike window beside it were covered with drawn Venetian blinds. Glimmers of light shone through the slits. There was some kind of sign hung over the steps. The electric bulbs in it were switched off, but Tom could make out the faint letters: "Jay's Steak House."

He continued walking to the corner and around the narrow block until he was back on the same street again. He didn't know what to do next. There was obviously something going on in Jay's Steak House that was attracting a large crowd, but what it was concerned with or how he could learn any more about it, he had no idea. While he was approaching the house again he counted eight more people entering it.

Then he heard the sloshing of shoes on the wet walk behind him again and a voice said, "Pardon, pardon, if you please."

He turned around. His hatbrim was pulled so low he had to bend his head back a little to see who was addressing him. What he saw was a thin fellow who wore a cap with a visor and a black slicker that hung from shoulders hardly broader than a coat hanger. They were standing in the halo of greenish light from the beer sign, so that the skin of the man's face looked ghostly green and unreal, and when he opened his bony hand to consult a scrap of paper in it the hand looked green too. For an instant Tom had the sickening feeling that the man hadn't spoken, but the voice came again.

"Pardon, can you tell me where Jay's Steak House is?"

The rain dripped off Tom's brim onto his chest. "A few doors farther on," he said. "You're almost there."

"You going too? We'd better hurry. It'll be packed again. We won't be able to get in."

Tom fell into step beside the corpselike creature. He hardly heard the whining explanation. "Got lost this time—damn rain and everything. All these streets out here look alike to me. Don't see why we can't meet in a decent place—we're just as good as anybody else."

The man ran down the basement steps and Tom followed. He had a half-formulated plan to see what he could when the door opened and then make some excuse to his companion and then get away as fast as possible.

A fellow who looked like a waiter in dark trousers, a white shirt, and a patent-leather bow tie swung the door open. The room was filled with people occupying rows of chairs and sitting on tables pushed against the walls. Tom heard someone speaking, but he couldn't see past the solid barrier of bodies that filled the room to the door.

"Good evening," said the waiter. "Squeeze in if you can. Mr. Jedson's begun the meeting." The thin man pushed inside and Tom followed. He noticed with relief that his companion did not remove his cap. They stood crushed up against the damp raincoats of the men in front of them. The waiter lounged against the closed door at their backs. It shouldn't be difficult to get out, Tom thought, if he decided to leave suddenly.

Although that much was settled he couldn't give his attention to the voice of this Mr. Jedson coming from up in front until he had located Stock. Slowly he raised himself up on his toes and peered toward the front of the room. What he saw almost popped his eyes out. Stock was sitting on one of the tables next to the wall and beside him on it was Lawrence Kenyon, the man on the station platform the morning before. This was the first time Tom had seen him without his hat, but there could be no mistake about it. It was Kenyon all right, a cigarette in a short black holder jutting from his mouth, his sunburned face shining with perspiration. As Tom watched him he leaned over to speak to a girl in a chair in front of them.

She nodded without turning around. The hair between her hat and coat collar was very blond.

Tom let himself down on the soles of his feet. He was filled with a mixture of relief and anxiety. The relief was because he realized there was no possible danger of Stock or Kenyon seeing him, hidden behind this crowd. The anxiety was because now he knew that the hunches and ideas he had been playing around with regarding Stock had blossomed into full reality. It was no longer a game, a jigsaw puzzle, for his own amusement. Something was going on.

Tom listened to the voice of Mr. Jedson. He was talking about "they."

"They," he was saying, "tell us our boys are dying to save America. Who's threatening America? Think that over, friends. Why must a boy born and bred in Chicago, on the shore of Lake Michigan, get his head blown off on Guadalcanal, a malaria-infested piece of dirt? Did we care about Guadalcanal before?" he asked loudly. "Did we ever even hear of it before? They tell us we must save America by sending our sons to die in the deserts and jungles of the world. But you and I know they lie. We know who it is we are really saving. . . ."

Tom stretched up again for a glimpse of Mr. Jedson's face. It was a disarming face at first look, handsome in what used to be called an "Arrow-collar" way. He had thick brown hair that fell over his forehead in a manner too boyish for his years. The audience applauded when he paused, giving him a chance to flash an appealing smile or wipe his forehead of what his manner implied was honest sweat. He was clever with his voice, too, and he did not make the mistake of being overdramatic. He chose the tack of wooing his audience with a kind of emotional pleading. It was the type of voice, Tom thought, the proper function of which was to sell millions of boxes of breakfast food over the radio, but, selling half-baked ideas like this, it was potent and dangerous.

"They tell us we are fighting for Freedom," Mr. Jedson went on, "and it sounds impressive. A couple of egomaniacs meet in the middle of the ocean, and all of a sudden we are fighting for four high-sounding freedoms. And what happens while we fight? They use the war to steal our real freedom from us. They come into our homes and tell us what to eat and how much to eat and where to drive our cars and how far to drive them. Can this be our America? Our land of plenty? Plenty for whom? For the riffraff, the foreigners, the undesirable elements kicked out of every other place on earth—and you know who I mean!"

There was loud clapping, and Mr. Jedson shook his hair out of his eyes. Tom's companion nudged him. "Why doesn't he come right out and say who?" he whined. "What's he afraid of?"

After about five minutes more of talk along these lines Mr. Jedson dropped his accusals and grievances. He stood up straighter and smiled.

"Tonight I have good news for you, my friends. At last we are going to get the support that we deserve. It's been a hard fight—meeting at each other's places like this, without money for halls or offices or printing. Now I want to announce to you that several important people in this country who believe the way we do and sympathize with our struggle are ready to help us. I am not at liberty to divulge their names yet. Some of them are prominent in the radio and publishing fields; some of them are in political life.

"Mr. Lawrence Kenyon, counsel for our national committee, has been traveling about the country, visiting our local chapters and laying plans for the co-ordination of our activities. When these plans are completed I will be able to tell you . . ."

Tom stretched up again to watch Kenyon. The blond girl turned halfway around and was whispering to him. She was not a girl but a woman. The hair that had looked so blond in that light was really white. She was Amy Bissell.

After a few more words about the good fortune that was to come Mr. Jedson evidently decided that now was the proper time for some real funds, however small, to materialize. He started a plate along the rows, and Tom realized unhappily that the clatter of coins was not predominating. These people, for the most part shabby and frayed, were contributing bills. The audience had relaxed and was shifting about into little conversational groups. Tom felt that this was the time to leave. He turned and went up to the waiter still leaning against the door.

"Excuse me," he said. "I have to leave now."

The waiter stiffened and blocked his way. "Not so fast," he said angrily. "Whatcha trying to do—skip out before the plate gets——?"

Tom didn't listen to any more. The waiter's belligerent tone was rising. It would attract attention in a moment. Tom drew back his arm and, lunging forward, crashed his fist into the waiter's jaw. With a grunt the man slid to the floor. Tom stepped over his body, was out the door and up the steps before he heard a single shout. He ran the short way to the corner, but there were no cries and no pursuit. The people in Jay's Steak House were not anxious to call attention to themselves.

Tom walked rapidly for several blocks until he came to a lighted drugstore. He went in and bought a box of gauze and a roll of adhesive. Then he asked the druggist where he was.

The druggist regarded him queerly. His suit was soaking wet from his walk, and the collar of his coat was still turned up about his face. His right hand, which he kept thrust into his pocket, might have held a revolver. On top of that he asked an idiotic question.

"I want to call a cab," Tom explained. "I want to get back to my hotel downtown." He brought his hand out of its hiding place. The fingers were streaked with blood from the split places on his knuckles, but they obviously held no weapon.

The druggist shrugged and gave him the address. Tom went into the booth and called a cab. Then he dialed the hotel and asked for Miss Hathaway's room.

"Hello," he said. "Did I wake you?"

"Yes." Her voice didn't sound sleepy.

"I just wanted to tell you I'm coming up to your room in about twenty minutes."

"Thanks for warning me. I'll be sure not to open the door."

"Helen, listen. This is important——"

"Not to me." She yawned noisily.

"Helen, I'm in danger——"

"How exciting! You'll have to tell me about it tomorrow. I'm really too tired now."

"Listen, damn you," he said, his voice low and threatening. "You get dressed and expect me in twenty minutes." He slammed the receiver down and went out into the store.

"Did you get one?" asked the druggist.

"They're sending one right over."

The druggist glanced at the clock on the wall. There was something too shrewd and satisfied about his expression. No one else was around, and yet Tom remembered that through the thin walls of the booth he had heard a voice from the back room.

Just as he rushed to the door the cab drew up. He jumped into it and directed the driver to the hotel. He watched through the back window as long as the drugstore was visible, but the police didn't come. Maybe he had been mistaken; maybe that fellow had not called the police, but he was glad he didn't have to wait to find out. He recalled the suspicious white-coated clerk in the Detroit drugstore. I'm leaving a trail of mystified pharmacists all over the country, he thought, smiling. The smile felt funny. He hadn't smiled for hours. He closed his eyes and heard Mr. Jedson's voice all mixed up with Helen's: *The land of plenty for whom?* Then, *I'll be sure not to open the door*. She'd open the door, he thought wearily; she damn well better open it.

She opened it the instant he rapped. She had on a dress and her bare feet thrust into backless slippers, but her face was white and scared without make-up. He went into the bathroom and let the cold water run over his hand. When she saw his hand all the sarcastic questions she had begun asking dried up on her lips.

"Get the bandage out of my pocket," he told her.

They wound the gauze around his knuckles until the blood no longer soaked through. Then she lighted him a cigarette and handed him the telephone from the bedside table as he instructed her to do.

"Just tell me one thing, Tom," she begged. "Was it Tally?"

"No. I wish it had been." Tom dialed long-distance. "Don't get it wrong," he said; "nobody tried to kill me. I only hope I didn't kill a guy." He gave the operator a person-to-person call to a city four hundred miles away. "I'm charging this to you," he told Helen. "I'll pay you for it. Who's in the next room?"

"Judy and Carol on one side. No one we know on the other."

Tom got his connection. "Hello. Senator Carlinger? . . . This is Tom Bonbright. Sorry to disturb you at this time of the night, but it's important. I hope I didn't alarm you. . . . Thanks." He grinned at the mouthpiece. "That's encouraging, because I have a tremendous favor to ask you. Could you possibly get away tomorrow? . . . Fly up here to Chicago! I've run into something concerning Lawrence Kenyon and I've got to talk to you."

Helen heard the senator's voice coming crisply from the other end of the wire.

"Swell," said Tom. "If I could get to you I would, but there's a bunch of Hollywood stars coming here for a bond rally with us tomorrow and I don't dare back out. Wire me at the Shoreway when you're arriving."

The senator spoke for another minute, and then Tom said, "Just one question for now. Does Kenyon have a big black car and a chauffeur in Detroit? . . . I thought so. See you tomorrow then."

Helen took the phone from him and replaced it on the table. "All right," she prodded him, "begin, and don't leave anything out."

Tom lay back on the bed and told her the story. He started with how he had found out that Stock had lied about coming to the McAllister Mill in a taxi the day of the explosion. He explained what he had been doing in the radio station that morning. He related his adventures at the meeting a short while before. When he finished he sat up and unwound the bandage from his hand. The blood had clotted and the cuts didn't seem so large.

"What I don't understand," said Helen, "is why you didn't slip a dollar into the contribution plate and leave quietly. You'd look a nasty mess if they'd all jumped on you before you got out of there."

Tom shook his head. "It's one of my usual misconceptions," he said, "that they deserve a punch in the jaw and not a dollar." He flexed his hand carefully. "You're right, of course. It was risky—but at least I don't have to think they have one red cent of mine in their dirty pockets. Anyhow, Stock hasn't any reason to connect me with that row, but I'd feel easier if we could think of a way to camouflage this hand."

Helen went to the dresser and came back with a round flat box. "Pancake make-up," she announced. "It covers everything. You moisten this sponge and pat it on those cuts. When this stuff dries they won't be noticeable. I'm not wearing any right now or you could see what it does."

Tom looked at her. "I'm glad I've seen you without stuff on your face," he said. "I was afraid you were too theatrical for the wilds of New Hampshire, but I shouldn't have worried."

"What have I got to do with the wilds of New Hampshire?"

"You're going up there with me after this tour is over, aren't you?"

"What is this?"

"A proposal. It just struck me that I have more important things to worry about when I wake up every morning than whether or not I'll find you angry with me. If we're married I'll lean over and ask you."

She slipped the make-up box in his pocket and gave him his hat. "I'm afraid I can't possibly go with you when the tour is over," she said. "They're casting three new plays in New York that week, and Charlie's gotten me calls to read for all three of them."

"Think it over," said Tom. "I'm offering you the lead in New Hampshire."

The hall was empty. He walked quietly down it to his room.

16

Charlie was in an extremely bad humor the next day. His irritation had been increasing steadily since they had first arrived in Chicago and he had seen the billboards and posters promoting the big bond rally that was to take place on their last night there.

These plentiful and gaudy advertisements promised an entire evening of brilliant entertainment by a carload of Hollywood stars, two name bands, and the OPP Caravan. Tom Bonbright was headlined as a star attraction along with Bob Hope and Dorothy Lamour. But what irked Charlie was the appearance of Helen's name in unimportant small letters, together with the names of some starlets and an acrobatic dog act. That was a blow not easily borne—to be listed with a trick mongrel. For once Helen hadn't seemed to mind. "It'll make a good story to tell the reporters when I'm a star," she said. Yes, thought Charlie, it was all right for her to have the tolerant long view—she had a rich father to count on, while he had to gamble his future on a percentage of her earnings. Just what were her earnings likely to be, he asked himself, if her prestige was as low as her name on those ads?

His resentment over all of this was added to that morning when a development even more disagreeable was apparent to his trained eye: his client was in love. The thing he had been dreading had happened. What is more, it must have happened at the witching—and thus most potent—hour of the night. He had heard Helen give Tom an icy brush-off when they returned from the radio station yesterday noon. He himself had escorted her to a press party that evening after their show and never left her side until he said good night to her at her door at midnight. After midnight, then, the thing had happened.

It wasn't anything Helen said. It was the way she behaved. She was actually expansive and wide-eyed and delighted with life. It was no show—it came from way inside. He had gone into her room to have breakfast with her and found her flinging herself about like a schoolgirl and her face schoolgirlishly innocent of make-up.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "Don't you feel well?"

"Feel well? Charlie, I feel wonderful! *Wonderful!*"

"You look pale to me."

"That's because I have no make-up on. How do I look without it? I was wondering how I'd look if I were out camping in a forest or something and couldn't be bothered with lipstick and mascara and all that."

"Since when are you going camping?"

"I'm not. But it's nice to hear that you look all right just being your natural self for a change." She studied her reflection in the mirror. "I feel like a different person."

"How different?" Charlie asked cautiously, but the waiter had knocked just then and wheeled in the two breakfasts and a morning paper. Helen picked up the paper and leafed through it. Then she spread a page out on the bed and flung herself down beside it. It was a full-page ad for the rally, with photographs of the star performers. She was staring at a picture of Tom.

"What a face," she murmured, "craggy as a mountain."

It was at this point that Charlie's hopes had stirred slightly. Crags, he thought, were broken cliffs, weren't they? That didn't sound so good.

"Come on," he said, "eat your breakfast before it gets cold."

She did. She ate everything. Good sign Number Two.

By that afternoon Charlie had decided that he was an alarmist. Tom Bonbright hadn't said anything unusual to Helen when they started on their rounds of the war plants, and as a matter of fact he left them in the midst of the tour. An important matter that had to do with his other work, he told Charlie, and promised to be at the Lake Theater at seven that evening. Well, thought Charlie, things were looking up. What difference did it make if Helen was in love? It takes two to make a marriage. It takes a marriage to ruin a career.

At four o'clock Tom found Senator Carlinger waiting in the room he had reserved for him at the Shoreway Hotel. The senator explained that it had been impossible for him to get a seat on an earlier plane, and since he was fearful of being held over in Chicago too long, he had snatched at the chance of getting a plane back late that same night.

"I figured I could cancel my reservation if there was any necessity of staying over," he told Tom.

"I don't believe there will be," said Tom. "I'll have to do my talking now and fast. I've an appointment with the local office of the FBI at five-thirty, and this big bond rally scheduled from seven on."

The senator's brows went up. "FBI?"

"You'll understand after I tell you my story."

Senator Carlinger took off his coat and loosened his collar. "Might as well be comfortable. I'll order up some drinks." After he had finished with the room-service clerk he sat down opposite Tom and smiled. "I never would have thought we'd be drinking together so soon again, Mr. Bonbright."

"It was very good of you to come. More than I deserve, perhaps."

"Maybe you'll be interested to know that the reason I came was the same reason I was so hurt by your cartoons concerning me—because I know that whatever the political differences between us, in the big battle we are both on the same side. Lawrence Kenyon and I aren't. That's why I turned down the offer he made me last week." The senator leaned forward. "You mentioned his name over the phone last night. Naturally I'm curious to know your story."

Tom repeated the story he had told to Helen the night before, explaining about Stock and why he felt compelled to find out what he was up to.

Senator Carlinger listened gravely until Tom had finished, then he said, "What do you think of James Landry?"

"I think that any man who owns forty newspapers owns too many."

"Didn't realize there were forty."

"The ones you don't hear about are weeklies. Some of them are the size of handbills in one-horse towns—but they add up to a lot of influence."

"One reason I asked is because I've seen your cartoons in Landry's papers."

Tom nodded. "He gets them from the syndicate. Then he uses up a column next to them to point out the error of my ways. Subtle method of proving he's open-minded."

"You said this Mr. Jedson mentioned that important assistance was coming from people in the publishing field——"

"Landry?"

The senator nodded. "Now let me tell you my story."

The senator's story was shorter than Tom's and not so dramatic.

"When I ran for re-election," he said, "a group of people called the 'Defenders of the American Way' supported me. I received campaign funds from them through their national counsel, Lawrence Kenyon. I didn't know much about them except that they believed as I did then, in an isolationist policy toward the European war. After Pearl Harbor they melted away along with all the other groups of that type.

"What you saw last night was a meeting of the same people under a different name. Now they call themselves the 'League of Militant Americans.' Landry and Kenyon are the big bosses as before, and this Jedson and a lot of lesser lights are whooping it up locally. About the only thing that's changed is their letterhead. I don't know how they got Amy Bissell with them. Maybe they bought her. They're good at that, let me tell you. When it was announced that I was resigning my job in the housing commission Kenyon hot-footed it down to Washington to see me."

Senator Carlinger ran both hands through his silvery hair and laughed. "I'm just a simple lad from back in the hills, but not that simple. Kenyon made me an offer to join his law firm in Detroit. I knew that, practicing law, I couldn't be worth his figure to anyone. Pretty soon he admitted I wasn't going to be bothered much with the office. I was to be the front for the League of Militant Americans, the flypaper to catch all the little flies to whom my name meant something. I turned Kenyon down the day you saw me with him on the train. Sabotaging the peace is not my dish."

"Is the League very large yet?" asked Tom.

"They're just getting started again. But they're after every malcontent, every hater, every frustrated fanatic in the country. Can you count that high?"

"What kind of a fellow is Kenyon?"

"Brilliant organizer." The senator spoke the words with respect. "Smart, ambitious, impatient. He wants power and he wants it quickly—but legally! He's too smart to try anything else right now."

Tom got up and drew the shade against the hot, orange glare of the setting sun. Then he paced the small room.

"I suppose," he said finally, "you didn't get much information about the program he plans."

The senator interrupted: "They haven't any program. They'll blow with the wind, waiting for some incident to fasten to—then they'll let rip with people like Bissell and Landry and whomever else they've got. It'll be right nasty the day that happens."

Tom mixed himself a fresh drink and sat down again.

"Wonder where my pal Stock comes in."

"He doesn't sound like much to me. Local *gauleiter* for the east coast maybe. By the way, that title isn't apt. There are no Nazis mixed up in this."

"Home-grown Fascists, eh?"

"That's right. You know, too many people around here think all villains have heavy accents or slanty eyes. They're wrong."

Both men sat silently for a moment, their faces creased with thought. Then the senator said, "If it's all right with you I'll go along to the FBI. Maybe I can supply some useful details."

"Thanks," said Tom. "I'd be grateful if you would come."

For the third time in twenty-four hours Tom repeated the story of Daniel Stock and of the meeting he had attended the evening before. The government men, a Mr. Brooks and a Mr. Rainer, listened with absorbed interest. They were young men, in their early thirties, Tom judged. There was no distinguishing mark of the government investigator about them. In fact, there was no feeling of official secret service in the small bare room in which the four of them sat. They might have been in any ordinary business office, and the two agents might have been salesmen. There was a purposeful neutrality of appearance and manner about them—a neutrality that could be very useful.

When Tom had finished Mr. Brooks left the room to get some files. Mr. Rainer, who was in charge, said:

"Since our phone conversation this morning, Mr. Bonbright, I've been checking with Washington and Boston on Daniel Stock. They don't have a thing on him."

"I suppose that means," said the senator, "that he hasn't until now been a member of any of these organizations like the Defenders and so forth."

"That's right. Whatever he's fooled around with up till now, he's been discreet about. Mr. Bonbright mentioned the greeting Stock got from Philip Wald. We know about Wald, of course. He was an active Bundist in New York State until things got too hot. He's truck-farming in Pennsylvania now and, we thought, minding his own business. Evidently he came to the rally to say hello to Stock."

"That's what interested me when I finally recalled who he was," said Tom. "That ties Stock up with some unsavory company."

Brooks came back with the files, and Rainer leafed through them. "We've been watching these organizations you mention," he said. "They no sooner get started than we get a file on them. The trouble is, as Senator Carlinger suggested before, we can't do much else but watch them. They're careful to operate within the law." He shrugged. "I've been to some of their meetings myself. The stuff they do is foul but legal." He leaned forward over the oak desk. "One night I heard them boo the President and Churchill—but when Hitler's name was mentioned they were silent." His voice trembled with anger. "It wasn't merely an absence of sound. It was a straining of everyone there to keep himself from applauding. That's just a sample of how they feel. They sit there brewing trouble for the rest of us and until they break a law we've got to let them do it. We're operating under a democratic form of government, luckily for them."

"Senator Carlinger doesn't seem to think that Stock or his friends had anything to do with the McAllister explosion," said Tom slowly.

"Of course not. That's clumsy stuff, and these people are wizards of delicacy. As a matter of fact, that affair is about ready to be cleaned up. You'll be reading the details soon. The League had nothing whatsoever to do with it." Rainer pointed to the files. "Kenyon, Landry, Bissell—they know their organization's existence depends on staying legal."

"Bissell was a surprise to me," admitted the senator.

"Ah, she was an easy mark. Flattery and promises. "We've known about her for a long time."

"What kind of promises?"

"Power." Rainer stood up and walked the length of the room. He no longer maintained the average-young-man impression. He was all FBI agent now, trained, efficient, and keen.

"From what you've told me," he said to Tom, "that's what they're dangling in front of this Stock. The way the man acts, the things he admitted to Miss Hathaway at the circus indicate he's a psychopath dominated by a lust for power; wouldn't you say so?"

Tom nodded.

Rainer came back and sat on the edge of his desk. "Stock's evidently in pretty well with Kenyon, and there must be a reason. They must have a use for him. That's what we've got to watch out for. Any theories, Mr. Bonbright?"

Tom shook his head. "Not an inkling."

"From what you've told me, I gather Stock's been quite interested in you and your belongings."

"I don't know what good that's going to do him. I have no inside information he could use."

"Just the same, be careful. He's a screwball and you never can tell." He shrugged. "Naturally we're going to keep close track of the activities of the League, but we can't watch every member. I'm going to ask you to keep an eye on this Daniel Stock for the balance of the tour and to communicate with us at the first sign that he's up to something."

Tom smiled. "That would be a pleasure. I'm beginning to enjoy being a sleuth. Maybe I'll drop cartooning altogether."

"Oh no, you mustn't do that!" warned the senator. The statement was made with mock concern.

17

THE BOND RALLY that night was the biggest of the tour. Thousands of people jammed into Chicago's Lake Theater to see the dazzling array of entertainment talent that had been lined up for the evening. Top stars from every Hollywood studio alternated with the OPP Caravan's acts to make up a program that lasted until eleven o'clock. During the intermissions enthusiastic bond purchasers ran up a total that surprised even the Treasury Department.

Toward the end of the evening Tom thought his right hand would drop off. It was still stiff from its meeting with the waiter's jaw the night before, and after the first dozen pictures he drew it was so cramped he had to quit until the circulation started again. They had changed his act, so that instead of drawing caricatures of the audience he drew them of the performers. Then the pictures were auctioned off. Tom returned three times during the evening to do the pictures, and each time he was so wildly cheered he could barely get off the stage.

Once while he was resting behind scenes Mr. Wells, who was master of ceremonies for the whole evening, introduced Helen, and Tom stood in the wings to watch her. She walked to the center of the stage in a low-cut white dress, her black hair streaming like a banner behind her. She used the microphone when she sang, and anyone could tell her voice wasn't particularly strong, but her personality got through to the audience in a few seconds; her vitality, the high spirits she was in tonight. They demanded two encores, and later when Tom's drawing of her was up for auction it brought as high a price in war bonds as Dorothy Lamour's.

The rally was to end on a serious note. Stock's stage appearance together with some seamen of the Merchant Marine had been chosen for the final act. While Stock was on stage Tom got ready to leave.

"I'm going to the airport with the senator," he told Helen, "and I don't think I'll come back here. They don't need me any more."

"But they're going to clear the stage for dancing. The two best bands in the country are here tonight!" Her eyes were shining with her triumph that evening. If she or Charlie had ever been doubtful of her audience appeal, there was no doubt now.

"Come back and dance with me," she said.

Tom shook his head. "I don't dance. I'm no good at these social graces. Dull fellow all around."

"Yes, aren't you?" Her voice was low and unfamiliarly tender. "You were wonderful tonight. I watched their faces. I could see what all of these people think of you. Tom"—she put her hands on his arms—"I keep remembering what you said last night. Did you really say it?"

"Are you going to marry me?"

"No, but——"

"Darling," said Tom, "I've got to beat it, or we'll miss the plane. I'll spend all the time coming back from the airport thinking up some new arguments for you. Will you give me a ring in an hour?"

"Yes, but——"

He kissed her just as Charlie was coming down the steps to the dressing rooms. Charlie got a smart press-agent's-eye view of the whole incident. His attitude had changed since morning. It wouldn't do his client any harm to get her name bracketed romantically with Tom Bonbright's, he thought. Yes sir, there were angles to everything.

Later, much later, Helen's enthusiasm for dancing was wet-blanketed by fatigue. She hardly saw the procession of faces that grinned down at her as her partners cut in on one another. Her own face seemed frozen into a smiling mask, and her feet moved numbly over the floor. She was sure her reputation for patriotism would be secure forever if it depended on the number of servicemen she had danced with. She had been pressed up against white middies and khaki shirts and officers' coats with hard buttons and even against the sharp outlines of several medals. In fact, she was shocked out of her weariness when she found herself in the arms of a middle-aged man in a civilian's suit. He wasn't very skillful at steering her around to the music, as he executed a bouncing two-step to every piece that was played. He had small snapping eyes under triangular arches of brows, and a one-sided smile that made him look intoxicated. After a few seconds he said, "That was quite a picture of you that Tom Bonbright drew."

Helen started. It was as if he had been reading her mind. She was thinking of Tom—she should have phoned him long before this.

"Mr. Bonbright's very clever, isn't he?" She grasped at the opportunity of mentioning Tom's name. She liked to hear herself saying it casually without any sign to anyone of how much it meant to her. "He makes the drawings with so little effort, and yet they tell so much."

"Yes. Don't they?" Her partner twirled her about ungracefully in one corner.

"I hate to think I'm sort of wound-up-ready-to-spring looking," Helen chatted on brightly, "and that my nose is like a hound's on the scent, the way he draws me, but I know it's true."

"You're a brave young lady to let him do it."

"It's Mr. Bonbright who's brave. Lots of people take his caricatures too seriously and want to punch him or something."

"Most intolerant, I'm sure." The man's face was on a level with her own, and he beamed at her, stretching his mouth out sideways in that manner of his. "By the bye," he said, "where is Mr. Bonbright? I've been looking all over for him."

"I'm afraid you're out of luck. He left long ago."

The man's grin subsided. "I wonder where I could find him." He spoke half to himself. "I wanted to get his autograph tonight. I can't afford the pictures—I'm flat broke—but I did want his autograph very, very much." His expression was really shattered.

Helen imagined a situation at once. She'd heard there was a profitable traffic in the autographs of the celebrated. Maybe that's what this poor fellow is counting on for his next meal, she thought. He looked seedy and worn out and she felt sorry for him.

"Come on," she said with the same expansive generosity toward him she had felt toward the whole world since the night before. "Come on across the street with me to the hotel. I'll get Mr. Bonbright's autograph for you."

Helen phoned Tom's room from the lobby.

"Hello. I'm sorry I couldn't get away long enough to call until now. May I come up?"

"Hell, no. It's too late. I'm ready to go to bed."

"You said you were going to think up some arguments for me."

"I've decided it's hopeless. If you have such a passion for dancing you can't stop once in three hours to go to the telephone—obviously we'd be incompatible."

"Okay. But we'll always have a beautiful friendship, won't we?"

"Good night, my beautiful friend."

"Wait a minute, Tom—listen! I've just finished dancing with a very nice man who collects autographs and I've promised him yours."

"Oh, my God——"

"Tom, please."

"Who is he?"

"I don't know his name. He's a gentleman fallen on evil days, I think. Please let us come up."

"All right then. If you're certain an autograph will get rid of you both."

"We'll be right up."

When Tom opened the door and saw them his expression was so ludicrously startled that Helen wanted to burst out laughing. But before she could make a sound she was pushed roughly against the wall, and her dancing partner charged toward Tom. There was the loud report of a gunshot and she heard Tom shouting and the crash of a chair as the two men struggled. She screamed, a single piercing scream, and strained against the terrible paralysis that stiffened her limbs and wouldn't let her move. She knew that Stock had rushed out of the next room and run into Tom's. Then doors opened all along the hall and other people in night robes ran to her. She shook her head and managed to drag herself away from her would-be rescuers. "It's Tom! It's Tom!" she screamed, but by the time they got to his room it was all over.

Helen saw Tom, very gray-looking, leaning against the bureau. Beside him on the floor Stock was kneeling over the quiet body of Tom's assailant. The autograph collector's eyes were closed beneath his triangular eyebrows. His mouth was still stretched sideways in a tipsy grin. There was something peculiar about his head too. It was twisted all around. It was askew on his neck like the head of a jointed doll.

Stock stood up, and Helen noticed fleetingly how unmussed his pajamas were, how cool he seemed.

"Guess I broke his neck," he announced.

Tom said slowly, "Thank you very much. He would have killed me if you hadn't come when you did."

"Who is he? Do you know?"

"His name is Roger Tally. He's wanted in New York for the murder of a friend of mine, a writer named Bill Roberts."

18

THE PAPERS played the story to the hilt, and Stock's heroic dimensions doubled. As the saver of Tom Bonbright's life from an attempted revenge murder by Roger Tally, Stock was the most talked-about, written-about man in the nation. Helen's part in the incident was well publicized too. Even Charlie could find no fault with the reporters' attitude that her sympathies had been played upon by the unscrupulous Tally, that she was an innocent victim of a tall tale about wanting an autograph, and that her natural kindliness had led Tally to Tom's door. What the papers did not know, of course, and what Tom and Helen knew well was that only one week before in the public library Helen had pored over the Roberts-Bonbright book containing Tom's drawings of Tally, to say nothing of dozens of photographs in old newspapers.

Tom's declaration that Tally had changed, that he had looked completely different in his heyday five years before, failed to console Helen. They were arguing about it in her room the next noon.

"I saw him on that Washington train and I didn't recognize him," Tom insisted, "and after all, I'd made a study of the guy. He used to be dapper and overdressed, and smooth and slick. Not the patchy old souse he looked like to you. There's no reason why you should have known."

"But his features were the same," moaned Helen, "his eyebrows and that sideways smirk. I should have recognized him from that alone." She stamped about the room angrily. "When I think," she went on, "of the things I said to him! Some people take your caricatures too seriously and want to punch you, I said!"

"He didn't know you'd ever seen that book about him."

Helen brightened. "That's right. He didn't. I couldn't have seemed as dumb to him as I was."

"Is that what's been worrying you?"

"No, Tom." She came up and stood very close to him. "If he had killed you—it would have been my fault. My utter stupidity."

"Don't be dramatic. If you hadn't fallen for that autograph gag—he'd have found another way. I promise to hold it against you though. You'll have to spend the rest of your life making it up to me." He pulled her to him and kissed her. Her fingers wandered up over his face.

"I'm going to worry about you forever," she said after a moment. "I'll get terrible lines in my face and people will say, 'What's the matter?' and I'll say, 'I'm worrying about a friend of mine. He does very dangerous work with a pencil.' "

"I'll send a wire to Mr. Harmon," said Tom suddenly. "I'll tell him to start getting enough stuff into the cabin for two."

Charlie bustled in just then with an armful of papers. He was getting used to seeing what he saw, and it didn't bother him in the slightest.

"Break it up, pals," he said jauntily. "I've got to talk business with my client."

"What is it now?" asked Helen.

"The news has traveled East, of course."

Grandly Charlie waved a piece of yellow paper at her. "It's a wire from Gebhart. He wants you to be in New York next Saturday. He's holding a place for you in his new show. You'll be billed right beneath Geraldine Paul." He thrust the paper at her. "This is the beginning, dear. The tour's over Friday in Boston. We'll fly to New York Friday night. It'll work out fine."

Helen didn't take the telegram from him, so he put it carefully back in his pocket.

"Then we're going on as scheduled?" she asked.

"Yep. I talked to Washington. They feel there is no reason to quit now unless Tom or the company is too nervous. I talked to everybody, and they all said okay. They figure there's nothing else left to happen to us. The girls are jumpy, but they want to do it for Kathleen's sake. How about you, Tom?"

"Why should I be nervous now?" answered Tom. He went to the door. "I've got some wires to send myself," he said. "See you later."

"Remember, we've one more session with the police this afternoon," called Charlie. "Coroner's office at two."

Tom sent three wires. One was addressed to his boss, OPP head in Washington, D.C. It said:

SORRY MISSED YOUR CALL. AM PERFECTLY WELL. WILL CONTINUE WITH TOUR AS SCHEDULED.

The second one went to Jason Woodburn at the Cleveland *Inquirer* in Cleveland, Ohio.

SORRY TO BREAK PROMISE GIVING YOU SCOOP ON REASONS FOR MY BODYGUARD BUT TALLY REFUSED PERMISSION TO PHONE BEFORE SHOOTING. THANKS FOR LETTER. WILL KEEP YOU INFORMED FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS.

He reread Woodburn's short note before tearing it up. It contained information about Stock gathered quickly by a Boston friend of Woodburn's. Details such as the dates of Stock's attendance at Harvard, the number of years he had spent abroad studying art, and so forth, were not very revealing. The personality details were nothing new. There was only one real bit of enlightenment in the letter. This was an item about Stock's failure to get into one of the famous clubs at Harvard. "It was a great blow to him," Woodburn's friend had written, "as he was a complete snob. One of his classmates whom I questioned said that was the main reason for his leaving Harvard. He felt humiliated and bitter. He vowed that someday he would be in a position where no one would ever dare humiliate him again. This fellow wanted to know what had become of him. He was surprised to hear it was the same Daniel Stock who was on the OPP Caravan. The modest hero role didn't fit in with what he remembered about his old schoolfellow."

In this flimsy recollection, thought Tom, might well be the answer to all of Stock's actions. If he was after power of a kind what better way to get it than to hang around with Landry, Kenyon, Bissell, and company? If he made himself useful enough they'd reward him well. Tom wondered what Stock's specific assignment was. Certainly the man was not going to disappear back into his solitude on the Cape Cod dunes. Charlie had said it was the mention of Tom's name that made Stock agree to join the Caravan in the first place. But why? Tom kept asking himself this question. Why Stock's continuous curiosity about his methods and his work? Was Stock passing this information on to his friends? They knew, of course, that the moment they stepped out into the open one of their strongest attackers would be Tom Bonbright. Were they preparing a counterattack? Were they going to make him an offer, perhaps?

Tom laughed to himself and tossed the bits of Woodburn's letter into his wastebasket. They couldn't be that foolish. But then people who'd always been able to buy anything they ever wanted were often foolish. In the meantime the fact that Stock had saved his life made Tom acutely uncomfortable. It was hell to be obligated for your very existence to a man whom you loathed and distrusted.

All at once Tom straightened and cracked his fist sharply on the desk. *Why had Stock saved his life?* What better service could Stock have done for his own cause than to allow Tom to be wiped out of the picture? Tom remembered what Stock had told Helen about his rescue of the seamen: "I made the decision. I chose the ones who should live and the ones who should die." Why had he made the decision that Tom should live? Or had it been merely a reflex action. He'd heard gunfire and a scream, and once he'd got into the room he had to go after Tally or be shot himself. Tom grinned. It was some consolation to think about Stock's reaction on finding he had been so inconveniently heroic.

He drew the pad of telegram blanks to him and wrote out his third wire. It was addressed to a Mr. Elias Harmon at Essex, New Hampshire. It said:

> ARRIVING NEXT FRIDAY EVENING. PLEASE PREPARE CABIN AS USUAL. EXPECT TO REMAIN TWO WEEKS.

He had sent this identical message to Harmon for years, every time he had been able to get away in the summers. Any change in it would have upset Harmon terribly. He could imagine what that thorny old bachelor would have to say to his cronies at the store:

"Tom's wired he's bringin' a wife along! He always sez he comes up to git away from everythin' and everybody, and now he's bringin' a female with him! First thing you know, he'll be wantin' a road cut through to the cabin and lace curtains in the windows." Then Harmon would puff a huge cloud of his smelly pipe smoke over the counter and mutter a few picturesque oaths, and the whole cracker-barrel club would agree that Tom Bonbright was slippin'.

The scene melted away. None of it was going to happen.

On the rest of the tour traveling toward the East from Chicago the Caravan was received by enthusiastic crowds wherever it stopped. Stock was by far the most lionized member of the troupe. His name and the story of his two courageous acts were common knowledge everywhere. His pictures appeared in the weekly news magazines. Editorials about him were in papers all over the country. He was besieged by genuine autograph hunters and fan mail. He received this acclaim in an unexpectedly modest fashion. Tom had thought he would enjoy basking in the national spotlight. On the contrary, he became more retiring. He kept to his hotel rooms as much as possible. He withdrew into his berth on the nights they spent on the train. He seemed to be shrinking from attention and preoccupied with his own thoughts.

Nadine's budding infatuation for him had become full blown since the night of Tom's rescue. It was clear every time she looked at him that she would, at a sign, become his devoted slave. She changed from the serious-eyed college girl she had been when they started out to a mooning adolescent. Tom noticed that Stock made no attempt to discourage her. He enjoyed showing off his power over her to the others. She ran errands for him and fussed over him. When she appeared on the stages wherever they went to tell how she had come to write her prize-winning song, there were some noticeable changes in her little talk. Formerly she had said that she was "honored to have the opportunity of telling so many people how her country and its cause had inspired her song." Now she said simply that she was "honored to appear on the same platform with Daniel Stock."

Tom wondered sometimes what the basis of her fascination was. He remembered that there had never been a villain, never a gangster or a tyrant who hadn't fascinated some woman. Maybe the answer was chemical. At any rate Nadine worried him. He spoke to her about it once and was sorry. She had turned on him.

"If I wanted to be rude I could tell you that what I do is none of your business, Mr. Bonbright," she had said, "but besides that, I think such advice sounds pretty crummy coming from you about a man who saved your life." After that she tried to avoid talking to Tom.

The Caravan on the return circuit made appearances in Buffalo, Rochester, Albany, and Schenectady with no further unscheduled incidents. Charlie and the pianist kept up a gin-rummy game for four days; two of the chorus girls finished knitting the sweaters they had begun, and when Tom wasn't working on roughs for his cartoons he practiced throwing darts. The special car began to look like a novelty shop as the troupe filled it up with the souvenirs and gifts they received. There were posters and photographs and boxes of candy and toy soldiers and keys to cities and the blue satin cushion Stock had won at the circus and flags and scrolls expressing appreciation and baskets of flowers.

On the night they were traveling to Boston, Tom and Helen sat together in the only place they could find to be alone—the dark train platform between their car and the one behind it. They talked about many things, but uppermost in their minds was the thought that this was their last night together on the tour. Tomorrow noon in Boston each of them would start on separate ways again.

Helen moved restlessly in the darkness, lighting one cigarette from another. After a while she said, "I wonder if subconsciously I could have known I'd meet you on this trip. I worked so hard to get myself taken along."

"My subconscious must be very insensitive," said Tom. "I worked so hard to get myself left home." He moved the suitcase he was sitting on close to hers and put his arm around her. "Now let's start from the beginning and go all through it again. Why aren't you going to marry me?"

"I didn't say I wasn't going to—ever."

"You mean you will at your convenience? But, darling, I'm a terribly busy man. I can't think when it will be convenient for me again."

She was silent.

"Go on," he prompted her. "This is where you tell me that you'd be buried alive if you married me, that I'd go on doing all the things I've always done and expect you to stay at home and be a housewife. By the way, you know that's damn nonsense, don't you?"

"But, Tom, can't you understand? That's the kind of a wife you should have. You *ought* to come home to chocolate cake in the oven and mended socks in the drawer. You *ought* to have someone to wave to you from the garden gate and tell you when you need a haircut."

"This is where I interrupt to tell you I haven't a house for you to be a housewife in. I haven't a garden or a gate. Cake makes me fat. When my socks get holes I throw them away. I picked you because I thought you lacked that horrible female instinct to be constantly taking care of someone."

"You're mistaken. It's very strong in me. I'm afraid of succumbing to it."

"That's no argument. What you're afraid of is missing this Gebhart handout——"

She pulled away from him furiously. "There! You've said it! I knew the truth would pop out of you sooner or later! You think he wants me because of the publicity I got. Maybe he does. And I'm going to accept his offer just to show you and him that I've got more than publicity."

"Calm down, darling, this isn't in the script we've been rehearsing the past few days."

"Well, I'm putting it there right now. And stop laughing."

"I'm not. Should I be?"

"Are you thinking of all those stunts Charlie and I figured out to sell me to the public? That cheap interview in the radio station? I was ashamed of it—that's why I was mad at you for listening."

"I know, darling."

She stamped on her cigarette. "Tom, I want to tell you something." Her voice was tense and resolute. She spoke as if she were forcing herself to say the words. "I've changed since we started on this trip. You see, I never met just people before. Everyone was a somebody who had money or position or pull or use. Audiences were simply a lot of four-forty seats. As far as I was concerned, the word 'balcony' meant a stage prop for Romeo."

"I see."

"It began that first day in Pittsburgh when I looked down from the stage and saw fellows in overalls with grease on their hands and women with kids in their laps, and suddenly I realized they hadn't come because they happened to have the money but because they wanted to because they liked us. And later there were all the people in the plants in the middle of the night applauding and cheering us, when it should have been the other way around. All the people in all the cities everywhere we went —I began to feel that no matter what I did it would never be good enough for them. Do you get what I mean?"

"You mean you found out that people are human beings."

"Something like that. And now that I've got this chance, a good play and a good part, I can't pass it up, Tom. Now I can make sure of myself without any stunts and tricks and press-agent gags. I think I always knew that was pretty trashy stuff."

She sat down beside him again and put her head on his shoulder. For a few minutes they listened to the rhythmic rumbling of the train wheels and the jangling of the metal floor under them. Then she said:

"Will you be working hard up at the cabin?"

"It never seems like work up there."

"What about the League of Militant Americans? Aren't you going to go to work on them?"

"As the FBI fellow said, we have to wait until they start something—then we'll do plenty. But we can't snipe at them until they come out of their holes."

"I'm glad this is almost over. It makes me sick to see him hailed as a great hero. The fraud!"

"I wish I could forget that he's responsible for my being here."

"Think of it this way. If he hadn't come in maybe you could have rescued yourself."

"No. There was nothing I could have done." Tom laughed. "Peculiar, how things work out. When we first got to the hotel I was tempted to ask them to change my room because I didn't want to be next door to Stock. Yet if he'd come an instant later I would have been dead." He paused, recalling the scene. "He went after Tally with such sureness, such savagery. Tally's gun didn't mean a thing once those hands were on him." Tom whistled. "I wouldn't like to have him after me."

"He might be. When you start pitching into his friends."

"Come, now. Very few people actually go out to murder cartoonists. Your viewpoint's all out of whack from what's happened the last two weeks."

Helen sighed. "It's hard to believe that less than two weeks ago we were sitting on a train platform talking, like this. So much has happened since then."

"You've only kissed me once since then."

"There," she said. And then after a minute: "Now that makes twice."

"This is a hell of a love affair," Tom said; "no place to be but crowded stations and hotel lobbies and machine shops and train platforms." They stood together and looked up at the unbroken black clouds in the sky. "Why can't I even have a moon like other guys?"

19

NADINE had pictured the scene to herself a dozen times: She would be standing in his dressing room when he came off the stage in Boston. The applause from the audience would still be echoing through the hall. He'd be smiling, flushed a bit with the tremendous ovation he always got. He'd throw open the door and stalk in to pack and then he'd stop, astonished, because she would be there and his suitcase would be all packed and she'd say:

"Everything's done for you. You don't have to touch a thing, so we've a whole hour before your train leaves to go to lunch and say good-by."

Beyond that the scene grew hazy. He would laugh and take her to a nice little place that he knew of (Boston was his home town, after all) and then—well, it was up to him to say something if he ever wanted to see her again.

Now she jerked and twisted at the knob of his dressing-room door. It wouldn't budge. Most of the doors on the narrow corridor were wide open—she couldn't imagine why Daniel had locked his. Her whole plan was ruined unless she could find someone who had a master key. When she did find the old man who served as custodian he was doubtful about doing what she requested.

"Oh, really, it's all right," she insisted. "Mr. Stock won't mind in the least. You see, I want to pack up for him. He hardly has an hour before his train to the Cape leaves."

When the door was open Nadine said gaily, "You can come in and watch me if you think I'm going to steal anything!" She bustled around the dusty cubbyhole gathering up things. There really wasn't much: a shirt and a tie, a few handkerchiefs and paper-covered books, a bottle of ink and some pens. She had opened the suitcase to begin putting them away when she noticed the cardboard folder tucked under the clean clothes. Curiously she drew it out and flipped it open. Why, what was he doing with Tom Bonbright's sketches? she thought.

Then as she looked at them more closely her mouth dropped open and she felt her face grow hot. "It just isn't possible," she said aloud. "I don't believe it." She stared harder at the drawings and at the inscriptions beneath, searching them for some other interpretation, for some hint that the cartoonist didn't mean what he said. But there was no such hint; the cartoons in Tom's simple bold style were clear enough, and his signature was blacked in as usual across the corners.

She glanced through the open door. The custodian had gone, but Mr. Wells was just walking past.

"Mr. Wells!" she called. And then she stopped, not knowing why she had called him.

He paused and eyed her inquiringly. His face seemed gloomier then ever.

"What can I do for you, Miss Hall?" The famous voice was thick and listless. She was sorry she had stopped him, but now she might as well show him what she had found.

"Take a look at these," she said, bringing the folder to him.

He opened it, looked through the pictures, and gave it back to her. A strained laugh twisted up out of his throat.

"Our enemies are all around us, aren't they, Miss Hall?" he said bitterly. "If you'll excuse me now—I—I must pack."

He left her.

She put the folder back where she found it, put Stock's things away in the suitcase, and fastened the catches. Just as she finished Stock walked in. It turned out not at all as she had imagined. He wasn't smiling. His face was livid.

"How did you get in here?" he barked at her.

She faltered. "The janitor let me in. I'm—I'm sorry. Do you mind? I just wanted to say good-by."

He was making an effort to control himself. "It's all right then; I didn't mean to sound harsh. You surprised me, you know."

"I have another surprise for you. You're all packed. I thought we might go to lunch and——"

He jerked the suitcase up on a chair and snapped it open. "I see," he said softly. "That was thoughtful of you." His hands rummaged around in the case until he found the folder. He pulled it out and laid it on top of the other things. Then he looked at her appraisingly. He appeared to be waiting for her to tell him something.

"Yes, I looked at them," she blurted out. "I thought they were your sketches, and I've never seen anything you've done, so I looked at them——"

"Go on."

"I think they're disgusting. I didn't dream Mr. Bonbright felt that way! Talk about a Fascist mind—he's got one himself." She came to him and laid her hand on his arm. "I don't know why you're keeping the cartoons for him, but be careful. He even warned me against you."

"What did he say?"

"Oh, that I shouldn't take you too seriously. That I shouldn't fall in love with you until I knew you better. But I am in love with you."

Stock looked down at her queerly. Then he picked up his suitcase. "Let's get your things and go somewhere for a long talk before my train leaves."

In her dressing room her bag was all ready. The blue satin circus pillow was resting on top of it.

"What are you keeping that thing for?" Stock asked.

"Helen threw it away." She looked affectionately at the painted verse. "Hiram Haversham wrote bad poetry, I know, but I want it for a souvenir anyway."

On the way to the station to check their luggage Stock said suddenly, "Hiram Haversham was born in this city, you know. Some of his descendants have turned his house into a shrine for his admirers."

Nadine giggled. "Does he have any?"

"You'd be surprised. He even had a beautiful lady commit suicide over him—because he addressed some sonnets to her rival."

"I'm sure the sonnets weren't worth it."

"She jumped into the river behind his garden." Stock turned to her, his face relaxed and beaming. "Years ago I visited his house. Would you like to see it?"

Nadine was surprised at the eagerness in his face. "Let's not today. There's so little time, and he was such a very minor poet——"

"But it's interesting. We'll have lunch afterward and I'll take a later train."

"Will you? That would be wonderful!"

The house stood in the center of a prim row of similar houses that stretched along a steep hillside. They were red brick with white-framed narrow windows and doors flush with the cobbled street. A polished brass plaque fastened to the door of this particular house read: "Birthplace of Hiram Haversham, poet, 1821–91."

Inside there was a smell of waxed floors and furniture polish and mustiness. The blinds were drawn against the sun and the rooms were dim. An old woman sat behind a desk knitting. She looked up in surprise as they walked into the hall. Then she nodded at them and bent back to her needles. A dozen leather-covered *Complete Works of Hiram Haversham* and an open guest book lay on a table near the door. Nadine pointed to the last name in the book. It had been put there five days before.

"Business isn't so good," she said, smiling. She scrawled her own name underneath it and began to hand the pen to Stock.

"No, thanks. Let's look around."

They walked from room to room, examining the more or less commonplace antiques that had belonged to the dead writer. They went upstairs and looked at his hand-hewn maple crib and the big four-poster bed he had died in and the tintypes of his ancestors and his mother's collection of majolica.

Nadine found it all boring. She wondered why Stock had brought her. Did he really feel that it was a treat to see this stuffy old house? The dismal quiet in the place depressed her. There was no sound save the creaking of the floor boards under their feet and the old lady's needles clicking out in front.

When they finally went into the little walled garden behind the house she felt much better. It was almost cheerful with its garden beds and oval pebbled walk. Maybe now, she thought, he would say something about her confession in the dressing room, about her loving him.

Remembering the scene, she turned to him impulsively. "Tell me you're not angry any longer that I had your door unlocked and packed your things!"

"I'm not angry. Only very, very sorry."

"But why? Was there something you didn't wish me to touch?" She had a flash of insight. "The cartoons? Did you promise Mr. Bonbright you wouldn't let anyone see them? I won't say a word. I swear I won't."

"It was unfortunate, but now that it is done, don't worry about it, my dear." Stock's fingers pressed into her arm. His tone changed. "The story they tell," he said, "was that she paced around and around this walk, trying to make up her mind."

"Who?" asked Nadine.

"The lady who loved Haversham too much and killed herself."

They were walking around and around the walk now too. Nadine began to feel impatient. What did she care about that stupid female? She wished they'd sit down on the garden bench and talk about themselves. Stock's fingers were sunk deep in her flesh. They hurt her.

"You can imagine how she felt when the sonnets were published," he was saying in a low, soothing voice, as if it were a bedtime story. "All of Boston laughing at her, another woman first in the heart of her beloved. She was half crazed with anguish. Around and around she paced, just as we're doing, looking up at the windows of his room"—Stock stared up at the windows too—"searching for his face, for a sign that he still cared about her, that he might call her back——"

Really, thought Nadine, he's getting too dramatic. He's almost silly. Why, she told herself, he's almost frightening!

"But no sign came," the voice went on. "The sun had gone out of her world. Her heart was bursting. She knew what she must do." Stock unlatched the wooden gate at the back of the garden and they walked through. Nadine gasped. They were on the bank of a river. The water, brown and sluggish, lay several feet below them.

Stock's voice had sunk to a whisper. " 'Why live any longer?' she must have asked herself as she dragged her feet toward the brink."

Nadine cried out, "You're hurting me!" She sank to her knees in the grass. "You're frightening me!" He stood over her, not saying any more, his cold light eyes staring at her. She didn't have a chance to plead, to scream, to do more than whisper two small words, "The cartoons," before his hands pressed on her throat and the pain and blackness came.

20

ON THE PLANE from Boston to New York, Helen tried to analyze the peculiar sensations that were milling around in her. They should have been predominantly pleasant: she had just been through two exciting weeks that had publicized her much better than she had hoped. The tragic and near-tragic fortunes of the OPP Caravan would not be soon forgotten by any literate citizen in the United States. The great Gebhart had offered her a good part in his new play. Tom Bonbright had asked her to marry him. And, if her conscience in any way need soothing, the troupe had sold twice as many war bonds as the Treasury Department had predicted.

Helen glanced across the aisle at Charlie. He was asleep. The bright shafts of sunlight that came through the wispy clouds above them lighted the utterly contented expression on his face and glinted on the collar pin showing beneath his tie. What was he dreaming? she wondered. That after she went to work for Gebhart he would buy all his ties at Sulka's? She turned away from him and stared out the window. She deliberately smiled, but the facial movement brought no accompanying emotional response. Why, she asked herself silently and desperately, did she feel so low? Why were the undersides of her eyelids so dry that a sudden blink might spill over with tears. What was the matter? She listened to the vibration of the plane's motors for a few minutes before she admitted to herself that it was Tom, that she was miserable because she was not with him. They'd said good-by so casually at the theater just before she and Charlie got into their cab. He hadn't kissed her. He hadn't even touched her. He'd just stood there on the curb looking at her.

"I'll watch for the show in the papers," he had said. "I'll come up from Washington and be your claque on opening night. No charge."

"Won't you be in New York before then?"

He had shrugged and, strangely hurt at that, she'd stepped into the cab without another word. He closed the door after her and stood leaning on the window.

"What are you going to do until traintime?"

"What do you suggest?"

"You might do something about that eye." The cab started to roll. "And you need a haircut," she shouted.

She wasn't sure he had heard her, for when she looked back he was still standing there, his hair tousled and his eye black, like a little boy who'd just been in a fist fight. But the instinct she had felt to go back had not been maternal. Far from it. She wanted to hurry back and hold onto him and never let go—and to cover up this impractical emotion she'd told Charlie to, for heaven sakes, give her a cigarette and asked the taxi driver what monument was that in the middle of the square?

So that was all there was to the great parting. No brave smiles, no chosen phrases, no clinging hands. Hollywood wouldn't waste such an opportunity as they had wasted it, and that, she thought triumphantly, was the point. This wasn't Hollywood; this was real. I'll phone him tonight, she told herself. I'll phone him tonight and say everything I didn't say. Then she remembered the cabin had no phone. There was no way she could talk to him for two weeks. The tears pricked through under her eyelids. I'm probably the only actress in America, she thought, who started off for a part in a Gebhart play by crying.

Then she began to think about Tom's black eye and how Mr.

Wells had given it to him. Now that she had time to ponder on the incident it seemed even queerer than when it had happened.

Everyone was standing about backstage, shaking hands and saying good-by, except Nadine and Daniel Stock, who had left earlier. There was an atmosphere of camaraderie and reluctance to end forever the two weeks of shared experiences. Helen had been talking to Mr. Wells when she saw Tom coming toward them. She sensed that Mr. Wells went rigid beside her as Tom stretched out his hand. Then in one flashing instant Mr. Wells drew back his fist, clipped Tom forcefully in the eye, and sent him sprawling on the floor.

"That's what I think of your filthy cartoons." The Englishman's voice was hoarse with venom, his face ashy gray as he stalked away.

Tom leaped up and started after him, but Charlie clung to his arm. "Let him go, Tom," he begged. "He doesn't know what he's doing."

"That's what I'm going to find out," answered Tom furiously, "just what the hell he thinks he is doing!"

Charlie blocked the way. "Listen, Tom, let him alone. He's upset. He got a cable yesterday. His son went on a bombing mission and didn't come back. He wouldn't let me tell the rest of you, but he's all broken up——"

Tom stopped. "I'm sorry." He rubbed his head dazedly. "But why's he got it in for me?" He looked around at the stunned faces of the girls.

"What did he mean?" asked Helen. "What cartoons is he talking about?"

"How should I know? From what he's said to me on this trip, he and I see the same way about practically everything."

"He's probably extra-touchy now—you know how it is," said Charlie, "with his son missing and all——"

"What's the tie-up?" Tom demanded. "I haven't done a cartoon about England for weeks, and if I had it would be full of praise for the English people. If he's stewing, for some reason, about the things I did about Chamberlain or the Cliveden set—but he can't be. He agrees with me. He told me so." Tom ran his fingers gingerly over the bruised flesh beneath his eye. "I think he owes me a simple explanation."

But by the time Tom went in search of him Mr. Wells had already taken his bag and gone.

Thinking it over now, Helen wondered what the explanation could be. It was absolutely incompatible with everything she knew about Rupert Wells that he would passionately strike a man without an excellent reason. All at once it became very important that she should find out that reason. Something inside her seemed to be urging her to investigate.

"It's really none of my business," she said aloud.

"Anything that concerns Tom is your business," insisted the voice.

Yes, she thought, yes, that's true.

Having admitted it, she felt a great deal better. She refused the stewardess's offer of a stick of gum or cotton for her ears. She sat up straighter and watched the long silver wing of the plane below her window. Tomorrow after the meeting with Gebhart she'd go to see Mr. Wells, she thought, and then she'd write Tom a note. She remembered that he had to go into town to the post office every few days to send his cartoons, so he could receive mail. She'd write him a letter and tell him Mr. Wells's explanation, and a lot more.

On Saturday afternoon at five Helen sat on the sofa in Mr. Wells's hotel suite and waited for him to serve tea. He had brewed it himself on a small electric plate and he'd ordered up bread and butter to go with it. He was telling her about his plans for returning to England. He expected some papers clearing his return to arrive momentarily. When they came he would go to Canada and leave from some port there on whatever boat had room for him. It would be a complicated procedure, involving weeks of waiting at the embarkation point and a long dangerous voyage across the Atlantic.

He put the steaming teacup before her and passed the sugar and pitcher of milk.

"I don't know why I go on like this," he said. "I'm so delighted at the prospect of returning home, I guess, although it will be greatly changed without——" He stopped and stirred his tea.

"Without your son?" Helen prompted gently. "I want you to know I'm so very sorry. Perhaps——"

"Not much hope. He was shot down over Germany. I shan't be able to take his place in the Army, but there are other things they might find for me to do. All of our enemies aren't in Berlin."

"That's what Tom always says."

"No one should know better."

Helen balanced her spoon delicately on the edge of her saucer and in a tone just as delicate, ready to recede at the first sign of his displeasure, she said, "What cartoons were you speaking about yesterday when you struck him?"

"Did you ask him that?"

"He has no idea. He's completely bewildered."

Mr. Wells laughed shortly and poured himself another cup of tea.

"Do you think if that were true he would have allowed me to walk off the way he did, without fighting back?"

"He respected your grief."

"I tell you I saw the cartoons. You'll see them soon enough yourself. No doubt he means to publish them at the proper moments—when they'll do the most harm."

"Please don't mind my cross-examining you like this, but won't you tell me what they were about?"

"Why have you come?"

"Tom has no idea I'm here. I came because I have to know. I have to know what you saw. I'm—I'm in love with Tom."

"All right. Since you asked I'll tell you." His hand shook so that the teacup clattered a little and, noticing that, he set it down. "I can't describe the details of the drawings, of course—I saw them so briefly—but they were subtly and viciously anti-English, anti any plan of world co-operation after the war, and one of them came out quite clearly for a negotiated peace before the end of the year. Almost any sentiment that might make Hitler rejoice was expressed in them, Miss Hathaway. They'll hurt our cause; they'll disrupt this country's unity when they appear. Mr. Bonbright's influence is no mean thing. I dare say he carries more weight here than David Low does at home."

"But Tom's influence is based on the fact that since the beginning of the war he's stood for the very opposite of all these things you've been telling me. Tom couldn't have drawn those cartoons——"

Mr. Wells's voice was frigid. "I appreciate your distraction, Miss Hathaway, for as you said, you are in love with the gentleman. But there is no doubt about it. I saw the drawings. They were unmistakably his."

"He never drew them."

Mr. Wells glanced at the leather clock on his desk. "You'll have to excuse me now," he said. "I've an engagement for dinner."

"Wait, please," pleaded Helen. "Just answer a few more questions for me. Where did you see the cartoons?"

"Miss Hall showed them to me."

"Nadine! But where'd she get them?"

"I don't know. I was going down the corridor past the dressing rooms when she called to me to come in. She was holding them."

"To come in where?"

"Why, into her dressing room, I guess."

"She had the very last one on the corridor. Think, Mr. Wells, think—was she in that one?"

"No." He hesitated and frowned. "She couldn't have been, since I was on the way to my own room when she stopped me. No, it was in the middle of the row."

"Tom's dressing room was next to yours, Mr. Wells. Was it that one?"

"No. Because I remember walking down the hall after I left her and swearing at his door as I went by."

"There, now." The blood was pounding in Helen's temples. "Where was Nadine? Do you remember anything in the room that might give us a hint?"

A long moment ticked by. Then Mr. Wells said, "A light rawhide suitcase was open on the floor beside her." His eyes met Helen's as they both made a swift inventory of each familiar piece of the troupe's luggage. "It must have been Mr. Stock's room," he said. "But I don't see what difference it makes."

Helen shivered. Pain stabbed at her forehead. "It raises a question," she said. "What were Tom's cartoons doing in Mr. Stock's room?"

"Only Mr. Bonbright can answer that."

"No, he can't." She stood up, pulling on her white gloves, working each finger carefully into its proper place. "Those cartoons are forgeries, Mr. Wells. Someone else drew them. Not Tom."

"I'm afraid there'd be no point to that. He could easily prove that——"

"If he was around he could prove they weren't his, yes. But what if something happened to him?"

Mr. Wells's fingers rapped sharply along the edge of a bookcase. "Can he be reached up at this mountain of his?"

"Only by letter. I'm going to write him all you've told me. He'll know what to do."

"You know more about this than you've said, don't you?" She nodded. "I should like to believe you are right."

"If you'll only not say anything about this until I hear from him——"

"I won't." One of his rare smiles lighted his face. "I hope I owe him the deepest apologies. It was nice to have you come. Sorry I won't be around to see your show. Maybe in happier days, after the war, someone will write a play with parts in it for a beautiful lady and a grandfather and we shall have a reunion."

Helen wrote a long letter to Tom that night, but even after it was sealed and air-mailed she couldn't sleep. Everything that Mr. Wells had told her, everything that she knew about Stock combined to give her nightmares. She tossed about until dawn.

The telephone must have been ringing for several minutes before it woke her. She reached over and picked it up.

"Hello! Hello!" It was Charlie. She glanced at the clock on her dresser. The hands pointed to ten-thirty.

"What are you doing up so early?" she asked.

"Never mind that. Have you seen the papers?"

"Of course not. You woke me."

"Nadine Hall's dead. Her body was found in a river in Boston last night!"

Helen held the phone away from her and stared at it in horror.

"Hello. Are you listening, dear?"

"Charlie, I'll call you back. I've got to use my phone immediately. You wait till I call you back."

She hung up and ran barefooted through the apartment to open the front door. The newspapers were flung against it in an untidy pile. The story was on the front page of the first one she picked up, only a few lines near the bottom of the sheet. The body had been found by a couple boating in the moonlight. The cause of death was a broken neck, which the coroner said might have resulted from a leap into the river where the banks were steep and high. . . .

Helen didn't read any more. She ran back to the phone and dialed long-distance.

"Operator, I must get in touch with someone who doesn't have a phone. He lives near Essex, New Hampshire." She tried to keep her voice level and reasonable. "Could you put me through to the operator at Essex? Perhaps she could take a message for me."

"Essex, New Hampshire," repeated the operator. "What town is that near?"

"Eight miles from Monmouth." Oh, wonderful that she listened when Tom had told her about his cabin.

There were voices and buzzes and questions and waits. The morning was blazing hot, but Helen's teeth chattered, and she drew the covers over her as she sat on the bed. Finally the blessed words came.

"This is the Essex operator. What is it, please?"

"I must get a message to Mr. Tom Bonbright."

"I'm sorry. Mr. Tom Bonbright has no phone."

"I know. I know. He's in a cabin a few miles from you on Lake Sokosu. You must send someone to him."

"Well, I don't know who——"

"It's a matter of life and death," Helen shouted. "I tell you, you must. He's in danger. He might be murdered!"

"Who is this calling, please?"

"A friend. A very close friend—his wife—please, you must listen to me——"

"One moment," said the operator. "I will connect you with Mr. Harmon. He takes things up to Mr. Bonbright sometimes. Maybe he can help you."

After more buzzes Mr. Harmon answered.

"Yes. What is it?"

Helen made her plea over again.

"And who is this?"

His slow, unexcited drawl discouraged her. Desperately she answered, "This is Mr. Bonbright's wife."

This announcement had the desired effect. His voice rose two octaves. "You mean Tom's married! By golly, then anything's possible. What is it you want now?"

"I tell you, you must go to Mr. Bonbright's cabin immediately. Take someone with you. His life's in danger. Tell him Nadine is dead."

"Nadine is dead?"

"Tell him Daniel Stock forged the cartoons."

"Daniel Stock forged the cartoons and this is Tom's wife calling."

"Yes. Yes, and please hurry. Mr. Bonbright will understand."

Helen rang off and phoned Charlie.

"See if you can get me a seat on the next plane or train to Boston. I've got to get to Tom right away—right away."

Charlie was smart enough to detect the determination in her voice. He didn't argue.

21

TOM'S CABIN was built in a clump of silver birches at the foot of Mount Sokosu and just a few hundred feet from the shore of the lake that bore the same name. Whenever he told people about its location they were apt to exclaim with rapture, "Why, then you can take a dip before breakfast!" Privately Tom thought a dip before breakfast a most idiotic and barbarous idea. He much preferred a leisurely interlude of bacon and toast and coffee and whatever news the radio had to offer until the sun was well up in the heavens. Then he'd put on his trunks and wander down to the narrow strip of beach with a good book and dark glasses. Finally, after an hour's reading and baking it was almost noon, at which time he deigned to try out the water.

He had followed this routine for years, and he followed it on this Sunday, save for a slight variation. He did not take a book to the beach with him. There was far too much to think about. A radio news reporter had just finished off his quarter hour by mentioning Nadine Hall's death. He had put it somewhat dramatically:

"Although the two-week trip of the OPP Bond Selling Caravan ended on Friday in Boston, a tragic fate had not yet ceased dogging its trail. The body of Nadine Hall, twenty, young composer of World

War II's biggest song hit, and a member of the troupe, was found floating in the Suffolk River last night. Death was not due to drowning but to a broken neck which might have been sustained in a leap or fall from the steep banks of the river. Boston police are investigating. This is the second time death has visited the Caravan. Kathleen Kennedy, a dancer, was killed at the McAllister Mill explosion during the troupe's appearance in Detroit. . . ."

Tom stretched out on the warm white sand of the beach and stared at the blue sky, as blue as Nadine's serious young eyes. How had she come to be in the river? he asked himself. He reviewed the events of that last morning in Boston. Stock had mentioned something about catching an early afternoon train to the Cape and had said good-by to everyone before the performance began. Nadine hadn't said good-by to anyone. She must have made up her mind hurriedly to leave with him. Where had they gone? What had Stock said to her? Why had she committed suicide? Was it suicide?

A movement far down the lake caught his eyes and, glad for a distraction from the questions marching through his mind, Tom shaded his eyes to watch it. It was the fire ranger from the top of Sokosu off to town on one of his infrequent free Sundays. He had stopped at the cabin to say hello earlier that morning on the way to the place where he cached his canoe. Tom looked regretfully after the fast-disappearing silhouette. For the first time since he'd been coming to the cabin his utter loneliness there depressed him. It would have been good to know the ranger was up in the tower right now. He didn't stop to figure out why he felt that way. He simply wished it wasn't the ranger's Sunday off.

He sat up and brushed the sand from his tender, newly sunburned back and arms. He felt restless. There was nothing he needed in town; there wasn't even a mail delivery, but he thought he'd hike over in the afternoon anyhow. With that settled, he was about to try the water when he heard a shout from the direction of the birches. He knew who it was even before the figure appeared through the trees and, curiously, he wasn't surprised. He heaved a long sigh of relief, and the tenseness ebbed out of him, a wary vigilance taking its place. It was as if he had known Stock was coming since he heard the news over the radio that morning.

"Hello," Stock called again. "I've been looking for you up at the cabin!" He was wearing brown corduroy slacks and a tan leather jacket slung over his shoulders. He looked hot and excited, but his excitement may have been due to his enthusiasm over the natural beauties of the place. At least he pretended it was. After remarking about them for a few moments he said:

"I hope I didn't startle you too much—appearing like this."

"Not at all," Tom replied truthfully.

"I wanted a rest and a change and I remembered you had said this is a wonderful place to paint."

Tom didn't remind him that it must have been Nadine who said that. He decided not to mention Nadine at all.

"I thought I'd try it. I've never been in this part of New England," continued Stock.

"It's a wonder you got through to the cabin, not knowing the country, and the path so overgrown," said Tom cautiously.

Stock flung his jacket onto the sand and sat down beside it. "Oh, I've got a sense for that sort of thing. I've always been good at finding my way in the forest, at stalking my prey, you might say."

The phrase disturbed Tom. He glanced swiftly at his companion, but Stock's attention was on the moving canoe, now but a speck on the lake.

He said, "That fellow has made his canoe travel, hasn't he?"

How do you come to know that, thought Tom, unless you were somewhere around here watching him leave?

"I understood," continued Stock, "that this was the kind of place where you didn't see a human face for days." He laughed pleasantly. "What with that fellow out there and me, you're breaking a tradition."

"He's the ranger." Tom gestured at the outline of the lookout tower, tiny and fragile, far above them on the mountaintop. "He comes down once in a while. You're my only unusual visitor. Where are you planning to stay?"

"Haven't decided yet." Stock began playing with the sand, raising it up by the handful and letting it stream through his fingers. "I left my sketching things in your cabin."

"Later I'll show you around. You might find something you'll want to draw."

"Yes, I'm sure of it." Stock's fingers traced a wavy line in the sand and rubbed it out. "But don't let me interfere with your plans. Weren't you going in for a swim?"

Tom stretched out indifferently. "I'm too comfortable to move. After a while maybe." He narrowed his eyes and saw against the glint of the sun on his lashes an ominous combination of visions: Stock's hands pressing the life out of Tally; Nadine floating in the muddy river. One thing he knew for certain—he must not for any reason go near the water. There was a rifle behind the kitchen door of the cabin. He must get it quickly. He turned toward Stock, watching the strong, never-still fingers sliding through the sand. They seemed to be writing a word and rubbing it out over and over again.

Tom squinted at the sun. "It's about time for lunch," he announced. "Did your hike give you an appetite?" He wanted to chat easily, normally. "I can't promise you a very grand spread, but whatever there is——"

He got to his feet and bent down to pick up his towel. It was then that he read the word Stock had been tracing in the sand. It was the name "Bonbright," but it was written in Tom's handwriting, identical to the last detail, to the placing of the dot over the *i* and the swift stroke crossing the *t*. The sudden knowledge that flashed over Tom almost paralyzed him. His fingers grasped numbly at the towel. What was it Charlie had said after his trip to the Cape? *That guy had made a perfect imitation of Kalman's painting. It was hanging right over his fireplace.* So Wells actually had seen some cartoons that enraged him, cartoons that were perfect and clever forgeries!

Stock had stood up too. He ran his shoe over the sand, erasing the name. His eyes met Tom's without expression.

"Whatever you have for lunch will be fine," he said. "After all, I can't expect much. I didn't let you know I was coming, did I?" He smiled. "Unfortunately, there was no possible way to get a message to you. You are very isolated out here, aren't you, Bonbright?"

They started toward the cabin side by side. Tom wondered when Stock would drop his polite pretense, when the cat-and-mouse game would come out into the open. He realized, however, that his companion was enjoying himself far too much to stop playing yet. Maybe in that lay Tom's only chance. If he could make believe that he was really going to prepare lunch Stock might play along with him until he got to the kitchen door. He could see the nail on the back so clearly, and the dusty rifle slung from its strap. As they walked through the clump of trees his brain was working on two levels. On one he talked with Stock about how to prepare bass for broiling, on the other he was trying to figure out what Stock's plan could be. If Stock had worked out some way to release the forged cartoons as Tom's own he would obviously have to shut Tom up—forever. There was only one thing consoling Tom. Stock must have killed Nadine because she knew about the cartoons, but he hadn't found out that Wells had seen them. On second thought this consolation proved swift and scant. Wells had been completely taken in. If the pictures were released he would never question their authenticity. Who would? And how much good would it do anyway? Once they were circulated the harm would be done and a retraction of their genuineness could never undo it. In the meantime he, Tom, would be face down in the lake or rotting in the woods.

Tom walked into the open door of the cabin and through the front room, still cluttered with the remains of that breakfast he had eaten so unsuspectingly. He saw Stock's duffel bag leaning against a chair in the corner. He went into the kitchen and reached behind the door. The rifle was gone. Stock must have spent several minutes in the cabin before he came down to the beach.

Now he was standing in the doorway, blocking it, his hands in his pockets. He was still having a wonderful time and savoring every minute.

"You're not really hungry so soon after breakfast, are you, Bonbright?" he asked. "I think you're being too polite."

Tom opened the cupboard and brought out a bottle of whisky. "Any excuse for a drink," he said. "There's no ice, of course, but I keep the soda cold in the spring out in back."

Carefully, knowing his life depended on not hurrying, he brought out two highball glasses and a bag of pretzels and put them on the table. Then he sauntered to the back door. "I'll get the soda," he said.

He knew that Stock had walked through the kitchen and was leaning against the window, watching him. He forced himself to walk at a natural pace, concentrating on breathing easily, on storing up breath and strength and singleness of purpose. There were some little scrub pines just in front of the spring. When he got beyond them he would begin to run, and if Stock hadn't yet left the kitchen he could count on a head start through to the beginning of the path up the mountain. What he figured on after that was a knowledge of the way, a telephone, and a weapon when he got to the tower at the top. The main thing against him was that he was soft and out of condition in contrast to Stock's perfect fitness and vigor. Also, Stock now had the rifle and probably a gun of his own. Tom had only one thing to hope for in that connection—that Stock didn't want to shoot him. It would be far more effective to have his death appear to be accidental.

He passed the pine trees as he had planned and sprinted nimbly toward the trail. There was no sound save the crashing of his own feet through the twigs and underbrush. The shouts, the hoarse cries, the sirens of the movie chase were missing. It was simply a warm peaceful Sunday noon and he was dashing up a mountainside. As he sprang over the soft dirt and pine needles underfoot, flushing swarms of insects and now and then a chattering bird, a sense of unreality came over him and he paused, panting, to listen. Unmistakably a couple of hundred yards behind him was the faint noise of Stock following.

Part of the trail wound upward through a pine forest and along a swift-flowing narrow stream. Although his throat was sore and choked with dryness Tom dared not stop for a drink. The sound of pursuit was getting too near him for comfort now, and he pushed desperately upward, impeded by the tree branches that had grown over the path, brought to his knees once or twice by the loose stones he stumbled over. At one place on his climb there was a clearing, and as he ran he could see the lake shining far below like a silver dollar and above him the jagged mountainside stretching straight up toward the sky. He threw himself down on the dirt and drew in great gasps of air, his arms and legs trembling with exhaustion.

When he got up again he had to place his feet on the rocks with care and search out niches for his hands to cling to. He hoisted himself along the sharp stones with a power that seemed to come from outside of him. Once when he looked down he saw Stock leaping across the clearing. After that he didn't look down again. He had begun to feel the cool breeze that blew like a promise over the tip of the mountain, and he had seen the tower on its tall steel stilts fastened to the slabs of rock above. In a few minutes he had pulled himself up onto them. He crouched instinctively as he ran over the bare unprotected surface to the iron-runged ladder of the tower.

He had almost climbed the ladder; he was just reaching out his hand to push at the trap door in the floor when the sharp explosive noise of the gunshot rang out and he felt a terrific searing impact against his thigh. He clung to the ladder with both hands, his leg swinging free for a moment as he felt the warm blood trickle down it inside his trousers. Then he pushed again at the trap door, opening it wide and frantically lifting himself up into the room by the strength of his arms. He heard another shot ricochet off the ladder below him and, turning his head, he saw Stock clambering over the rocks.

He grasped at a chair leg and pulled himself upright. The telephone stood on a shelf across the room. There was no time and no use getting to it now. His eyes fell on the glass-covered map spread out on the table and the clutter of field glasses, pencils, papers, and a shiny pair of dividers with sharp needle-like points. He took the dividers in his hand, pressing them shut. They were hardly longer than the darts he had played with on the train but far heavier. He stood above the open trap door. He saw the naked and brittle-looking skull with its fine down of new hair and the strong jointed fingers coming upward rung by rung. In an instant Stock would look up.

Tom drew back his arm and waited. He recalled Stock's own instructions now. *It's in the snap of the wrist; hold your wrist open, or cocked.* He was hardly conscious of the instant that the dividers left his fingers. He saw the long points strike Stock between the eyes and then the awaited scream came as Stock fell backward thirty feet to the rocks below. He lay there crumpled and still.

Tom dragged himself to the telephone. He held it to his ear, listening to the operator's patient "Hello, hello," and unable to utter a word. He hung up and tried again.

"Hello? Hello? Ranger's tower?"

"Who is this?" he whispered.

"Hello. This is the Essex operator."

"This is Tom Bonbright." His voice began to gather strength.

"Mr. Bonbright! What are you doing at the tower? Are you all right?"

"Yes," he said. Why was she asking him that?

"Elias Harmon and two other men set out for your cabin about an hour ago. We thought something happened to you."

"Something happened all right. But how did you know?"

"Your wife phoned from New York. She was terribly upset. She said you might be killed and we should send someone—your wife was so worried."

Tom sighed. He thought he must be getting delirious already, and he had to tell her his message before it was too late, before he wouldn't be able to make her understand.

"Operator," he said, "send someone after Harmon. Tell them to come up here and get me. I've been shot in the leg. I can't move. I'll be waiting for them."

"Oh, Mr. Bonbright! I'm so sorry! I'll send Harmon's boys after them right away."

Tom hung up and slid to the floor. It was nice lying there with no reason to move, no place to go. He felt sleepy. He thought he would sleep for a while until they came for him. There was hardly any pain in his leg now, only this constant flowing of the blood. He should stop it, he thought, but he felt too weak to raise a hand. What was it the operator had said? His wife had called? That made him think of Helen. He wanted to go to sleep and dream of Helen.

When he woke up it was very dark and he was in bed. The room he was in smelled of antiseptic and his leg throbbed with pain. Someone switched on a small lamp beside him. It was a girl in a white uniform and cap.

"Feeling better?" she asked brightly. "Mrs. Bonbright's here to see you." She took a thermometer off the table and shook it vigorously.

She had said "Mrs. Bonbright." That meant he was still out of his mind.

"If you said 'Mrs. Bonbright,' I guess I'm not so well," he said.

"Just the same"—she laughed politely and stuck the thermometer under his tongue—"that isn't going to keep you from seeing her. She's very insistent."

He shook his head vehemently, making gurgling noises. She was all wrong. He did want to see his wife. He was consumed with curiosity to see his wife. Only it wasn't his wife.

The nurse went to the door and opened it.

"You can come in now," she called.

It was Helen. She rushed in and pulled the thermometer out of his mouth and kissed him.

"Oh, darling," she said. "Oh, darling—darling."

Tom grinned. "When did we get married?" he asked. "That's one wedding I really wanted to go to."

"I had to say I was your wife, Tom, to get people to listen to me when I called Essex. I had to make them send help to you someway——"

"Then it was you——"

The nurse put the thermometer back in Tom's mouth. She glanced frigidly at Helen and then fixed her stare on her watch. During Tom's enforced silence Helen told him about her visit to Mr. Wells and what she had found out.

"And you should see what they turned up in that duffel bag in your cabin," she went on. "The cartoons, finished and wrapped and addressed to McLeod Features—all ready to be sent."

The nurse took the thermometer and wrote something on her chart. She left the room in stony silence.

Tom hoisted himself up higher on his pillows and winced.

"Does it hurt very much, darling?" asked Helen. "I'm so sorry. I—I get all faint and dizzy every time I remember that he might have killed you."

Tom nodded. "That was his idea. I understand now why he defended me so nobly in Chicago. He'd chosen the date of my demise himself. Poor Nadine—she never had a chance with him."

"He was a madman, a horrible, twisted beast. You haven't heard the rest of the story. The police found a letter on him. A letter from Lawrence Kenyon—it complimented Stock on the fine job he did of winning you over. It even complimented you on your clear-sightedness in supporting the League's policies!"

Tom's brows went up, and then he whistled, a long low whistle full of comprehension. "So that's what he told them! That he'd won me over! Naturally Kenyon wouldn't have stood for any roughstuff like this."

"Kenyon's letter said that as soon as your cartoons began to appear the League would concentrate all its energies on a big propaganda campaign to put its platform before the American public. Bissell was to start on the radio and Landry in his papers. The thing was all organized, Tom. Wait until you see the letter! Then at the end Kenyon promised that Stock would be well rewarded for this valuable service he did in bringing you into the ranks of real American patriots. Those were his words: 'real American patriots'!"

"Why, sure. I can see how Stock planned it!" Tom's voice was high with excitement. "He figured two weeks of cartoons like those he drew for me were enough to start plenty of confusion and dissension. A lot of my friends would be surprised, but he figures they wouldn't come rushing up here to ask me how come. I've surprised people many times in the last twenty years and usually I've been right. I mean——"

"I know, darling. Don't be modest."

"Then I suppose he planned that when I was found dead it would be blamed on an accident or some fanatic who disagreed with my change of heart. In the meantime Stock would get what he was really after anyway. He'd be the white-haired boy of the League of Militant Americans. See how it works, Helen? Don't you think I'm right?"

At that moment the door opened and the nurse looked into the room.

"I'll have to ask you to leave in a few minutes," she said, addressing Helen with severity. "It is very bad for Mr. Bonbright to do so much talking. I should think you'd realize that yourself." Her glance was dripping with disapproval as she withdrew her head.

"Well! What's the matter with her?" asked Helen.

"She thinks you're immoral, pretending to be my wife. You see, people up here always considered me very conventional."

"And are you?"

"In some ways. I mean I wear clothes when I go out, and I use silverware when I eat, and I fall for things like Mother's Day, and I give up my seat to females in the subway, and when there's a moon I tell my girl I love her, and——"

Helen didn't listen to any more. She reached over him and raised the window shade. Silvery beams flooded into the darkened room, splashing in bright patches across the bed.

"I realize talking is bad for you, Mr. Bonbright," she said, "but——"